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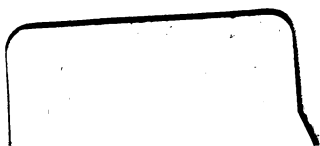
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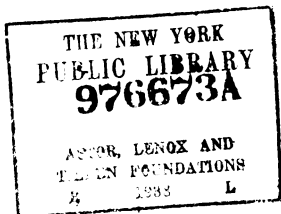
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OF THE
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THE LEADING STORY AND SKETCH PAPER OF THE AGE.

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TO
THE READERS OF THE
NEW YORK WEEKLY,

WHO FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS, HAVE
STOOD FAITHFULLY BY US, CHEER-
ING US IN OUR LABORS,
AND BIDDING US
GOD-SPEED ;
TO WHOM OUR
PET JOURNAL HAS BECOME
A HOUSEHOLD WORD, AND WITHOUT
WHOSE AID WE COULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED
NOTHING, THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED

BY THE PUBLISHERS,

STREET & SMITH.

NEW YORK



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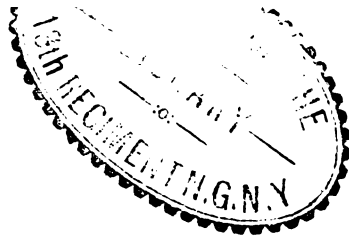
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THROWN ON THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

“YOU ARE NOT MY WIFE!”

“Hath he not sworn his love a thousand times
In this green valley, under this green hill,
Even on this hand, sitting on this stone,
Sealed it with kisses, watered it with tears?”

TENNYSON.

A GAIN the door of the dining-room opened, and Silvia Rymer, looking up, saw the flushed face of Hannah, the maid.

“It is after seven, and dinner was ordered for five. I cannot keep it any longer.”

Mrs. Rymer smiled, though a shade of uneasiness came over her beautiful young face.

“Has not my husband returned yet, Hannah?” she said.

“No!” was the blunt reply. “I always did think that when a gentleman once leaves a house, he never knows the time to come back.”

Mrs. Rymer laughed.

“Try to keep everything nice one half-hour longer. You can do it, Hannah, if you will try.”

“I can try,” said the girl, “but between trying and doing there is a wide difference.”

She went back to the kitchen, and Silvia Rymer took up the book she had been reading ; but it was in vain that she tried to fix her attention on it ; there was a mist between her beautiful eyes and the page ; the sense of the words she was reading did not reach her mind. She looked at her pretty, jeweled watch, it was twenty minutes past seven ; and when he kissed her that afternoon, he had said he should be back by five.

She rose from her seat and went to the window. No fairer scene than that on which she gazed ever met human eye. The grand Scotch lakes in the distance, and the heather-crowned hills stretching down to them ; a large, old-fashioned garden led to the meadows, and the meadows sloped to the borders of the lake.

It was in the month of June, and the sun shone upon the blue waters, the heather, and the flowers. The breath of the rose and the lily floated toward her ; among all the flowers blooming in the garden, there was not one so fair as the young face gazing over them.

“It is strange he does not come,” she said.

Just then, from among the roses, came a young girl, holding a lovely, princely baby in her arms.

“Bring the baby to me,” said Mrs. Rymer. She took the

child in her arms, kissed the little velvet cheek, caressed the little golden head, talked to him in that sweet language only known to mothers and children.

“Where is papa, baby?” she said; and the child raised his large, dark eyes to hers. Her heart grew warm within her as she looked at him. Ah! please Heaven, what a grand, noble man he would be in the years to come, but never so noble as his father, Alric Rymer. Earth did not hold *his* equal.

Then nurse and baby went away. Over the lake came the sound of the chimes—half-past seven. There was Hannah, looking very cross, with an appearance of great meekness.

“Would you be so kind as to tell me *what* I am to do with this dinner?” she said.

Mrs. Rymer went back into the room; the scent of the roses and lilies followed her. The room was the very picture of comfort, prettily furnished with flowers and books, the dinner-table bright with its choice linen and delicate silver. There was her husband’s chair ready for him; everything that he could desire or wish, prepared with loving hands and loving thought. He had left home at three, telling her he was going to Brae on some business.

Brae was a small town only two miles away. She looked round, noting every detail; on a side-table she saw a cigar-case and a kid glove, with a faded flower he had worn that morning. She raised the glove, and kissed it with pas-

sionate kisses. "My love! my love!" she murmured; "how was I worthy of you?"

As she stood with that half-divine light on her face, she looked fairer than any pictured dream. She was tall and slender, not more than eighteen, with a figure of perfect grace and symmetry; fine little hands, and fine little feet; a white neck, delicate and graceful; a face so pure and lovely in its fresh, girlish beauty—so sweet, so true, so eloquent—a face such as Raphael would have given to angels, framed in soft, shining hair, brown in the shade and golden in the sun; dark violet eyes, bright as stars. She was exquisitely, but simply, dressed. On her white neck shone a golden locket, worn with a golden chain, and on the fair, rounded arm was a bracelet of gold and precious stones. The sunlight fell over her, the perfume of the flowers floated round her; but she was lost in a trance of happy love.

"My love! my love!" she murmured again, "who in this wide world is so happy as I?"

Hannah again, but this time she held in her hands a letter, and her face looked less anxious.

"A messenger has brought this from Brae," she said. "The master sent it."

With a smile still on her lips, and a beautiful blush that overspread her face, as her eyes fell on the beloved, familiar writing, she took the letter. She kissed her own name because he had written it.

“My love,” she said again to herself; “how thoughtful he is for me.”

Then she sat down in his chair near the window to read it—Heaven help her!

With the sun shining above her, and the fair flowers around her, she read her death-warrant.

She read the words that struck her from the list of honored living women, and blighted her whole life.

One moment she was smiling, her heart warm with the thought of him; the next, that tender, loving heart was broken. Heaven help her, and all who suffer from the heartless cruelty of men!

These were the words on which the sun shone, words that stabbed and slew the truest, the kindest, and most tender of God’s creatures :

“MY DEAREST SILVIA :—It is better and kinder to speak plainly to you, and tell you all. You will blame me, but my excuse is I loved you so dearly, so madly, that I could not live without you. Always remember that, when you are disposed to judge me harshly. Always remember that I loved you first, dearest, and best; that no other woman can ever take your place in my heart; but, Silvia, I have deceived you—I was obliged to deceive you; all is fair in love, and if I have won you by stratagem, I am not the first who has forgotten what the world calls honor in love.

“Better for you to know the truth. I could not live with-

out you, but, Silvia, *you are not my wife!* Do not hate me. I could not marry you, because for some years past I have been betrothed to a lady in my own rank of life, and I am now compelled to leave you and keep my promise to her. I have misled you as to myself. You have believed me to be Alric Rymer, a man of moderate and mediocre position ; it is not so. Prudence forbids me to reveal my real name and rank.

“Now, believe me, Silvia, I am grieved to write this : if it had been possible, I would fain have kept all knowledge of this from you. The form of marriage we went through I knew was useless—it was merely to satisfy your delicate conscience—it was a vain, idle ceremony. I repeat this because I hope, in course of time, to know that you have married some one worthy of you.

“I hope common sense will guide you, and that you will avoid all tragic nonsense. Hundreds of girls have been in a similar position, and have afterward settled comfortably in life. Remember, if there be any blame, it is mine, not yours. You have believed yourself my wife, I knew you were not. It is hard to part from you—we have been very happy—but I dare not remain in Scotland for another day. I know you will grieve, but you must make the best of it. You may be very comfortable. I have made ample provision for you and the boy. If you will write to Messrs. King and Gresham, Thaves Inn, London, to whom I have committed your interests, they will tell you the amount of your income, and what is set aside for the boy. It will be paid to you quarterly, on

condition that you never seek to find me, my name, or anything about me. Your marrying will make no difference. Lake Cottage was taken for two years ; you had better remain until the time expires.

“ Now, good-by, my beautiful Silvia. My heart aches to write the word. You must try to forget me—try to make the best of it, and learn to be happy with some one else. The saddest hour of my life is this in which I leave you, but go I must. Though we shall never meet again, believe me always

“ Your lover and admirer,

“ ALRIC RYMER.”

From the thin folds of paper a bank-note fluttered to the ground, and lay unheeded where it fell.

Heaven help her ! There is no remedy either on earth or in heaven for such woe as hers. She read to the very end, and then sat still, staring, dumb, like one turned to stone. She did not scream, faint, or weep ; but the awful despair that came over her was terrible to see. The white lips were parted and open, but no sound came from them ; the violet eyes had a wild, lost, bewildered expression ; no trace, no outward expression of grief could have been so awful as this blank, silent, terrible despair.

The wind blew the falling leaves of the roses into the room, and then idly stirred the letter which lay at her feet ; that aroused her as though some living thing had lived beside her. She rose from her seat.

“Alric !” she cried, with a terrible voice, then rose, like one blind and dizzy, and went into the garden. She thought he was there ; her brain reeled beneath the shock ; there was nothing save the flowers and the trees, and she went back again, not knowing what she was about.

CHAPTER II

A DESERTED HOME.

"I pray thee, pass before my light of life,
And shadow all my soul, that I may die."

DID you call me, Mrs. Rymer?" asked Hannah, who heard something of that terrible cry. She turned her ghastly face and said "No." Then the girl, looking down, saw the bank-note on the ground. She picked it up wonderingly.

"Money is plentiful," she said, placing it on the table. "Shall I bring your dinner, or will you have some tea?"

"I will ring when I want anything," was the reply.

The girl wondered why her mistress's voice was so changed. She turned to look at her, but the white face was hidden from sight. She went away again, leaving the lady alone with her despair. Again she looked at the letter, and read it word for word.

"It must be a jest," she said to herself; "it cannot be true. I am his wife before God and man."

But those words were not jesting words; they were terrible, strange; but, as she sat in horrified, bewildered silence, it dawned upon her for the first time that she might have been

betrayed, duped, deceived, and deserted. Such things had been done before, but not surely by men like Alric. Alric, her handsome, gifted hero! so generous, so noble, so far above his fellow-men! It was not possible to believe it all at once—but, supposing it should be true?

She sat quite still and motionless—there was not even a quiver on the white lips.

“O Heaven!” she cried. “Let me die before I know the truth.”

She bowed her head, unable to think or to speak, bearing in bitter, anguished silence this first shock of her unutterable woe. What shame, what grief, what outraged love, what wounded pride, what anguish passed like a tempest over her, who shall say?

Half-an-hour had passed before she raised her white face again, and then there was upon it such hopeless, helpless, settled despair, that no one could have recognized her.

She rose slowly, and stood erect; her limbs trembled, a mortal sickness was upon her, mortal cold, that seemed to freeze the blood in her veins, and made her heart beat slowly.

“I am no wife!” she said. “I gave him my heart, my love, my life, my honor, and in return he has deceived me. I am no wife!”

She raised her face to the smiling summer heavens. She raised her white hand as though she would fain pierce with her wrongs the blue skies, and reach the great White Throne.

“God of justice!” she said, slowly; “God of light! I

appeal to you against him. I am innocent, for I believed that I was his wife ! ”

Did that wild prayer, that wild cry for justice, pierce the clouds and reach the merciful Father to whom no wrong cries in vain ?

She had been silent, stunned, bewildered, until now. The rose-leaves came floating slowly past her, the sun shone brightly over her, and a burning sense of outraged pride, of wounded love and wounded honor, began to burn her very heart away.

“ I gave him my love, and he has made an outcast of me. I gave him my life, and he has made me ashamed of it. I loved him, and he has left me. ”

The silence and stupor of despair had died away ; the very frenzy and rage of sorrow was upon her. Her eyes flamed with anger, her face flushed hotly. She took up the bank-note that lay on the table, and laughed—a sound terrible to hear.

“ This was to be the price of my love, my honor, my fair name, my soul ! ”

She tore it into shreds.

“ I will starve—I will die ; but I will take nothing from him ! ” she said.

She went up to her room and brought down all the jewels, the ornaments, he had ever given her ; she tore the golden chain from her neck ; one by one she threw them under her feet, and trampled them into a thousand fragments.

“I did not sell my soul for these!” she cried, as she spurned the fragments. “I will have nothing that has ever belonged to him.”

Then the wild fury died away, and she stood lost, bewildered.

“I cannot live!” she said to herself, hoarsely; “I cannot live! I was not proud; but I hold my fair name and my honor dearer than my life. I have lost both, and I cannot live.”

Once again she went into the room, and put on a bonnet and shawl; on the stairs she met the nurse and the baby. A low, bitter cry—one that must have pierced the high heavens—came from her lips. She did not look at her child; she turned her face away as he was carried by.

“Are you going out, madame?” inquired the nurse.

“Yes,” replied the hoarse voice. “Do the best you can for him. I am going out.”

She must die; the intolerable shame was not to be borne. Besides, in her fair, innocent life she had had but one love, and now that he was gone from her forever, how was she to live? She could not look in the baby’s face she was never to see again, and she could not kiss the pure little lips—she was going out to die! She stood in the sunlit garden, looking around her with haggard eyes—eyes that burned, but from which no tears flowed.

This time last evening he had walked with her up and down the broad paths, his arm clasped round her, laughing,

as she told him pretty marvels of the baby, laughing at her inquiries, her earnest, tender words. Just there, close to that great sheaf of white lilies, he had stooped to kiss her, and said he was jealous because she loved the baby most.

Yes, at that very moment, he knew that he had deceived her ; that she was not his wife ; that in twenty-four hours he would have left her forever.

A cry for vengeance, for justice—the cry of a broken heart—came from the white lips. Oh, for death ! for death ! She could not bear the shame of life ; she could not bear the horrible pain that tortured her.

Was there ever a sadder sight under the summer sun than this ? This girl, so young, so beautiful, so loving, looking around her for the means of death. And yet such a sight was but another record of the sin and the selfishness of men.

“ How am I to die ? ” she said.

There lay the lake, shining clear and bright in the sun, bearing white water-lilies on its calm breast ; bright-winged birds skimmed over it ; gentle wavelets washed the green banks. Should she seek her rest there ?

“ No, I could not die,” she thought ; “ I have been with him so often over that clear water. I should see his face in the depths, and I could not die. I must have a quick death, in which I shall not be tortured by any memory of him.”

Then she started, for she heard a sound of laughter—wild, unearthly laughter—it was herself.

“Am I going mad?” she thought. “Let me die! let me die! not live mad!”

She was laughing, for the idea had just occurred to her that it was a jest—a poor one, a sorry one, but still a jest; he had written that letter to try her, only to try her, and he would come presently from among the trees, laughing too, holding out his arms to her, and then—and then she should press to him with a long, low, shuddering sigh, and he would kiss her tears away.

“It could *not* be true,” she said to herself, now she stood out in the sunlight; “no man dare so wantonly and wickedly ruin an innocent girl; no man dare so outrage the laws of God and of man. She would go to Brae and know if it were indeed true.

“Dare he, dare any man win a girl’s pure heart and break it? Dare he have won her love, have taken her from home, have made a mockery of that solemn marriage rite, and so have betrayed her? No, it was not possible; even to the selfishness and wickedness of men,” she said to herself, “there were limits.”

She had, indeed, poor child, much to learn.

She would go to Brae. See, the sunlight lay low on the fields; the birds were all singing in the fields; the wind stirred the fragrant heather; the blue-bells and primroses laughed among the long grass; the smile of summer’s beauty lay over the fair earth; could there be such desolation, such anguish, such darkness and sorrow in store for her? No, it

was not possible. Earth would not mock her with its beauty or heaven with its smiles, if nothing but anguish and death lay before her.

She turned from the lake-side ; a short path through the woods led to Brae. The great boughs of the spreading trees stretched out on either side ; the beautiful sunshine came filtered through the green leaves ; the merry brown hares ran leaping through the woods ; quiet, and beauty, and fragrance were all around her. Could darkness and desolation be waiting for her on the other side ?

She reached Brae ; no one who had known her a few hours ago—fresh, fair, and radiant—could have recognized her now—haggard, with a ghastly face and despairing eyes. Some recollection must have come to her, for, as she left the woods and saw the little town of Brae lying before her, she pulled the veil over her face, and tried to look more rational, more like herself. The bells were chiming from the old church tower—chiming some sweet old melody to which she had often listened with Alric by her side. Where was she to go, now that she stood in the town from whence had come that cruel letter ?

CHAPTER III.

“WHY DID YOU NOT LET ME DIE?”

“I know

That wheresoever I am, by night and day,
All earth and air seem only burning fire.”

THERE was but one hotel in the little town, “The Brae Arms,” and there Alric had gone at times to play at billiards. She remembered that, and perhaps even now he might be there, laughing at the jest—such a cruel jest—so unlike him. *Could* it be a jest, after all?

One or two strangers who passed her by looked with wonder at her. Through the thick veil one could see the white face and the burning eyes.

“I must speak calmly,” she thought, “or they will think that I am mad.”

The landlord himself stood on the steps of the hotel. She clenched her hands so tightly while she spoke to him, that great red dents left their marks there for days afterward.

“Is Mr. Rymer here?” she asked, and the man, who knew her, replied,

“No, madame; he left at four o’clock. He went to meet

the train at Glenrock. I understood Mr. Rymer that he was going to Paris."

The landlord, who knew that the lady before him was called Mrs. Rymer, looked at her in wonder. She saw the look. No need to laugh and sneer at her yet—she would be dead soon. Before people knew that she had lost her honor and her fair name she would be lying dead—and no one sneers at death. She clenched her hands more tightly, and the physical pain brought her to her senses.

"Thank you," she replied ; "I did not know that he had gone."

Then she walked away, with no trace of the deadly despair that had mastered her in her manner.

"That seems queer," said the landlord to himself. "Why should he go to Paris without telling his wife?"

Still, it did not concern him, and he resumed his former occupation of whistling "The Laird o' Cockpen."

How was she to die? There was no mistake now—no hope left ; it was no jest, but a grim, horrible truth—a shame she would not face, a disgrace she could not endure—but the difficulty remained, how was she to die?

Great flushes of crimson were in the sky, and the rosy light lay on the clean pavement. She passed happy homesteads, where the father watched with smiles the gambols of his children, while the mother sang at her work. She passed happy young lovers, whose shy glances told their secret ; and all the time pain and anguish were at her heart.

She could not bear it. There was to be no more happy home for her, no more belief in a husband's love, nor delight in the smiles of a child. She must die soon—die before that golden sun set, and before men knew the story of her shame.

There before her was a druggist's shop. Plenty of means of death there. She entered. There was only a boy behind the counter; the master was out. She went up to him.

"I want some laudanum," she said. "I am suffering intense pain, and I must have some at once."

The boy looked up with something like a smile.

"Is it toothache?" he asked; and she, whose lips had never been sullied with a false word, bowed.

"You had better take a bottle of this," he added, pointing to some patent medicine.

"Yes," she replied, impatiently, "I will take that as well; but I must have laudanum. Nothing but laudanum will deaden my pain."

"I do not know," said the boy, "if I can sell poison. There is some law or other about it."

"You can sell it," she replied, steadily, "to trustworthy people. I have to sign my name in a book. You know my name—I am Mrs. Rymer, of Lake Cottage."

Then, before she had finished the words, she remembered that she had no claim to that name—it was not hers. The boy did not understand the crimson flush that came over her face, he thought the pain had caused it. He placed the bottle of laudanum on the counter, and served her with a small quan-

tity. She was longing for death—death, that should free her from shame. She sent the boy to another part of the shop, and he, all unsuspecting, went. While he was gone she took the bottle and filled the little phial that she had in her hand, then she paid him and hastened away. The door of the other world was opened to her now. She held the key in her hands.

Slowly she walked down the quiet street. At the end stood the old church, from the tower of which came the pealing of bells, the sweet old chimes. It was no longer a question of how should she die—but where. Where should she take her last look at the fair, smiling earth. Before her lay the church-yard ; there the dead slept in peace ; there was rest from shame, from disgrace, from misery. She would go there, and, sitting on one of those green graves, would drink the laudanum and die.

“That is my death-knell,” she said to herself, listening to the plaintive, sweet chimes. She sat down on a grave that had been made under the shade of a hawthorn tree, then looked round on earth and sky. Her farewell glance, and, ah, me ! how fair that world was, how grand the distant hills, covered with pine, covered with heather ; how beautiful the summer woods, with their shady calm and springing flowers ; how beautiful the little town and the old church, with its ivy-clad towers ; how beautiful those great flushes of crimson light in the western skies ; how sweet the song of the birds, and the chime of the bells.

She was going to leave it all, because the selfish sin of one man had made her life intolerable to her. She was mad with shame and sorrow ; no thought of right or wrong came to her. She never once remembered that her life was not her own to destroy when she would ; she remembered only the shame of her position and the blight of her life.

She would not remember her past ; she would not dwell upon the innocent days of her girlhood, the days when he who had deserted her had taught her to love him. She would dwell upon nothing but her betrayal and her desertion.

Suddenly, as she sat there with the poison in her hand, she thought of the little child ; in the madness of her anguish she had almost forgotten it—the child who, when she was dead, would be left alone and friendless in the wide world.

“ Better that—better that,” she moaned to herself, “ than that it should know its mother’s story.”

Then she raised the phial to her lips, and across the bewildered mind and whirling brain came the thought that she had to meet her God. A few minutes more and she would be face to face with the Great Father whom she had never willtully offended.

She fell on her knees, and a wild cry for pardon came from her lips.

“ He has driven me to death, O God ! ” she said, “ for I cannot hide the shame of my life. You are more merciful than men, take pity on me ! ”

Did that cry pierce those beautiful skies. Could there be a

deeper curse on any man, deeper condemnation, than that a woman should utter such a prayer.

She closed her eyes, and placed the bottle to her lips. Several drops of the bitter, thick, dark liquid had been swallowed, when a strong hand dashed it from her, and it fell broken into a hundred fragments, the deadly poison staining the sweet, green grass.

“What are you doing?” cried a clear, strong voice. “How dare you fly in the face of the living God? You are seeking to kill yourself!”

She raised her haggard eyes, and saw before her a stately old man, whose hair was white with age; his face beautiful with goodness and benevolence.

“You were going to kill yourself, child,” he said, looking at her in horror.

But she fell at his feet, crying wildly:

“Why have you saved me? Oh, why did you not let me die?”

CHAPTER IV.

THROWN ON THE WORLD.

"Life is mine. I who gave it
Alone can take away."

THE rector stooped and raised the unhappy girl in his arms ; he looked in wonder at the white, haggard face, with its terrible impress of suffering ; he wondered at her youth, her beauty, her sorrow.

"What can have driven her to death ?" he thought. She had not fainted—such misery as hers is rarely lost in unconsciousness. He placed her on the grave where she had been sitting, and again she moaned :

"Why did you not let me die ?"

He looked down on her—not unkindly ; he had seen too much of human suffering for that.

"If I saw you standing on the brink of a precipice," he said, "should I not draw you back ? If I saw you falling into a flame of fire, should I not try to save you from it ?"

She looked up at him, and he shrank from the pain and anguish in those sad eyes.

"You do not know," she said ; "you do not understand. I cannot live."

He took both her hands in his ; they were cold as death—so cold that the touch startled him.

“My poor child,” he said, quietly, “do you know that your life is not your own? You cannot prolong it for one moment, nor can you dare to destroy it. God gave it to you; God will take it back. You may not fling it in His face like an unwelcome gift.”

“You do not know,” she moaned.

“No ; I do not know, perhaps, your particular sorrow ; but I am an old man now, and all my life long I have been teaching the law of God ; I have seen suffering in every shape, in every form, and I know that nothing justifies *suicide*.”

She shrank at the word.

“I have seen human desolation and misery that could not be exceeded,” he continued ; “the remedy is submission to God, not willful destruction. Can you not trust me with the story of your sorrow?”

“No,” she replied ; “it is not to be told.”

“Poor child !” he said, gently ; “you are young to endure so much. But whatever your sorrow may be, do not make bad worse. This life will soon be ended ; whether it has been happy or miserable will not matter to us at the hour of death. Do not make it worse by adding eternal ruin to it. You know—though men of science may rave, and men of would-be wisdom may sneer—you know that for the crime of suicide there is no pardon. Would you like to be cut off forever from the face of the Great God?”

"I had not thought of that," she replied. "I only thought that I could not bear the shame of my life."

She sat silent for some minutes ; he watching intently her beautiful, ghastly face. Suddenly she looked up at him.

"Can you tell me why this has happened ?" she said. "I have been a good girl all my life ; I do not remember that I have ever willfully sinned ; I have been proud of my fair name, I thought it the crowning glory of my life, the crown of my womanhood, the one pearl beyond price ; I was never a coquette ; I never spoke a light word ; I never gave a free look ; I was modest as the white daisies here growing over the dead. If any one, to tempt me, had offered me the whole world as the price of my honor and fair name, I should have despised it. Now, can you tell me why this happened ? why my life is to be one long shame ?"

She spoke with such passionate eagerness he could hardly follow her.

"You forget," he said gently, "that I do not know what has happened. Will you not tell me ?"

A crimson flush came over the despairing face ; she flung herself upon the ground.

"I cannot—I cannot !" she cried. "I cannot sully my lips with my own story."

Mr. Douglas looked at her, not knowing what to do. The bells were chiming more slowly now ; the sun was setting ; birds were folding their wings ; the flowers closing their eyes ; the crimson flushes were dying out of the western skies ; the

gloaming was coming on. What was he to do with the unhappy girl lying with her face hidden in the grass, not weeping, not fainting, but cold and silent in her despair? He would not leave her there. He bent over her.

"Have you father or mother living?" he asked, and she answered him that her father had been dead many years, but that her mother still lived—far away, though, far away.

"Tell me where?" he asked patiently.

"Away in England—in Kent, among the hills and orchards!"

"Will you not go to her, or let me send for her?"

"No," she replied; "I shall never look upon my mother's face again. Oh, sir, if you would but leave me—leave me to die! I cannot, indeed I cannot bear my life."

"Have you not looked up to the ministers of God as holding any authority?" he asked gravely.

"Yes," she answered with a weary, woe-begone expression deepening on her face.

"Then, by virtue of that authority," he said, "I command you to tell me your story."

"I was seventeen," she said, "and cursed—listen to me—cursed with a beautiful face, when a stranger came to our town and married me. He was handsome and clever; ah me! ah me! there is no one like him. He asked me to marry him, and my mother said 'Yes.' I loved him; how can I tell you how I worshiped him? you would think it wicked. He was the very light of my eyes, the pulse of my heart. I

said I had done no wrong ; I had forgotten. My mother wanted us to be married at the church in our town, but he was not willing ; he told me he expected some money from a relation, who would never leave it to him if he found that he was married. He asked me if I would consent to keep the marriage secret for some time, and I told him 'Yes.' He asked me if, instead of being married at my home, I would go to Scotland ; there was danger for him, he said, in being married in England.

“ I was innocent of all wrong, of all guile, of all harm, as a little child ; but I did the greatest wrong of my life when I consented. He pleaded so earnestly with me ; he asked me not to tell my mother, lest she should be unwilling, for she would not understand as I did the need for secrecy. I must have been blind—but then, I was so young. I left home with him, leaving a letter for my mother that explained all ; and I, poor, blind, infatuated child, thought no harm and knew no wrong.”

She paused for a few moments ; the words came from her lips in such a burning torrent that he at times could hardly hear them.

“ I came with him to Scotland, sir, and we were married—I believed really, honestly, and truly married. If I had not believed that, sir, dearly as I loved him, I would ten thousand times rather have died than have done as I did. I have lived for nearly two years in a whirl—a dream of happiness. I thought often and often that heaven could not be fairer,

brighter, or sweeter than earth ; and when my baby came my heart melted with gratitude to God.

“Sir, listen to me. I was brought up modestly—to love God, to value my soul, to value my fair name above all other gifts. I loved this man, who wooed me with the deepest passion ; but I thought myself his true wife. Now tell me why I am so cruelly punished. There has come to me to-day a letter from him, and he tells me I am *not* his wife—that he purposely deceived me—that I do not know his name, his rank, or anything of him ; that he has left me forever, left me to marry a lady in his own rank of life ; that he has left me money, as though money could repay me. O God !” cried the wretched girl, “ why did you not let me die ? How am I to bear it ? ”

The kindly face of the good minister grew very white as he listened ; he raised his hand as though he would fain protest against the selfish cruelty, the sin, the crime of men.

“How long, O Lord ! how long ?” he sighed, for it amazed him how the good God had patience with men.

Then he laid his hand on the bowed head.

“It is very hard, cruelly hard, terribly hard for you, my poor child,” he said ; “but it will be harder for him on the day when he must answer for his sins. You never had the least suspicion, then, until now, that your marriage was a false one ? ”

“I never even dreamed of such a thing ; how should I,

how could I? I should as soon have doubted Heaven as doubted him."

It was her first experience of the world's wickedness, but it was not his. He had seen heart-broken women and wicked men before, yet he had never been brought face to face with such sorrow as this.

"You must not add to his condemnation by adding to his sin," he said, gravely. "If you destroy yourself, your death will lie at his door."

"Yet how can I live?" she cried, passionately. She plucked up the long roots of grass and flung them away. She looked so wild, so bewildered, that he felt afraid she would lose her reason.

"Others have had the same to bear. Others have been thrown on the world. You must make the best of it. You take a morbid view of your own case. Even suppose that all he says is true, you have been deceived. I cannot see that you are guilty of any sin; and if your own conscience be clear, and you are innocent before Heaven, ah, child! you must carry your burden bravely before men. What has happened is your misfortune, *not* your fault. Listen to me. Let me try to give you more hopeful views of life. A long and happy life may yet be before you, though you are now friendless and thrown on the world."

CHAPTER V.

LIFE'S GRANDEST LESSON—ENDURANCE.

LISTEN to me," repeated Mr. Douglas. "Let me give you nobler and higher views of life."

She turned her despairing face to him.

"You need not," she said, gently; "I know. I was well brought up; I had teaching such as you would give to a daughter of your own. You do not quite understand. Suppose even that, as you say, I am before Heaven quite innocent of all sin, that in the eyes of men I have been betrayed, not wicked; supposing that I have not the weight of great and unmerited shame to bear, still, how can I live with a broken heart?"

For one minute he made no answer, but a light, beautiful to see, came over his face.

She repeated her question.

"Tell me," she said, "how am I to live with a broken heart?"

"You could not have asked that question from one who would have known the answer better than I do," he replied. "Look; do you see that white marble cross gleaming between those trees?"

She followed the direction of his hand. The western sun-

beams lay low on the grass, and the trees were standing in a rosy golden light. From between them she saw the gleam of a white marble cross.

“I see it,” she replied.

“My heart was broken,” he said, “thirty long years ago, and was buried in that grave with my beautiful young wife. Yet I have lived on, and have done my Master’s work faithfully, ever since.”

Her eyes, rather than her words, asked him how it was.

“I had loved her for six years,” he said gently, “but we could not marry because we were poor. When this living was given to me, this pretty rectory became my own, with its fair surroundings of flowers and trees. I made it more beautiful still for her, and brought her home here one summer’s day—my wife.

“Ah, my dear child, it is given to some of us to drink our chalice with the foam on it, to taste the highest bliss, to drink the very dregs of the cup of despair. For one whole year I lived with my wife so happily that all I had conceived of the Garden of Eden seemed to me faint as a dream in comparison. I was so intensely, so wonderfully happy, that I used to go about trying what I could do for others, and how I could best diffuse this great joy of mine.

“For one year—one short, brief year, out of a long lifetime. We were looking forward then to the birth of a little child, and my wife’s sweet face grew brighter and sweeter each day with the anticipation of her coming bliss.

“What do you think happened? ah, me! How often in the first mad anguish of my grief did I dare to rise my eyes to Heaven and ask why was it? why was she taken away? why could not her most sweet and gentle life have been spared? They both died. Mother and child together. She died in great agony, without one word for me who loved her so. I never saw my baby's eyes, or heard one cry from the little voice. I was like one mad, running from room to room, asking the question that no one could answer: ‘Why did she die?’

“As surely as the sky shines above us my heart broke in that hour; no words that I could invent would describe my sorrow. My heart was buried with my wife, yet I have lived on for thirty long years, and I never call in question the will of my Lord God. I bow my head in lowliest submission; and you, child—you, young and beautiful, may live with a broken heart if you will do the same.”

Then, and for the first time, she broke into a wild passion of tears.

“He was half my life,” she wailed; “nay, he was all of it. I had no thought outside my love. I went to sleep with his name on my lips; my last thought was of him; I woke up blessing the bright day because it would give him to me. The world is all dark, all cold, all desolate. Without my love! my love! I do not know how to live! His face made my light, my sunshine, my brightness. His love made my warmth, my happiness. Are the summer days to pass and never bring

him? Are the flowers to bloom, the sun to shine, the leaves to bud on the trees, years to come and years to go, yet never bring him once to me? I cannot bear it! I do not know how to live!"

There was something so utterly despairing in her grief that tears rose to the old man's eyes.

"You do not know what such love as mine is like," she cried. "Do you know—do you know that if he stood there before me now I should fling myself at his feet, and forgive him all?"

"I do not think you would; he has betrayed you. As far as lay in his power he has spoiled your love. Remember, that while you gave him a pure and noble love, he gave you nothing but a selfish passion, undignified by the name of love. Try to forget him."

He never forgot the look she gave him.

"Forget him!" she cried; "yes; when the birds forget to sing, the flowers to bloom; when the sun forgets to shine, and the earth forgets its light; when I lie in my grave, cold and dead, I shall not forget him. Let him pass by and call my name, had I lain there for twenty long years, should I not hear it? Forget him! my pulse will stand still, my heart will cease to beat, but I shall remember him!"

Her face flushed hotly; her eyes grew bright and wild.

"I shall stand some day before the judgment-seat of God," she said, "holding my blighted, ruined life in my hand; I shall not forget him then."

“ ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.’ You cannot forget him, child ; you must forgive him.”

“ Forgive him ! ” she repeated. “ Yes ; when I cease to remember how I loved him, how he wooed me ; how he has held my hands clasped in his own ; how he has kissed my lips and called me his wife—his sweet wife, his dear wife, his loving wife ; how he has made me love him until my soul has grown one with his, and my heart torn from him is like a heart rent in twain ; when I cease to remember all this, I will forgive him.”

There was silence between them for some little time. The vesper song of the birds was dying away ; the leaves stirred faintly on the trees ; the flowers waved in the long grass ; the shadows fell darker ; the round, golden sun had set.

The minister bent his white head nearer to the girl.

“ The first smart of your sorrow is on you now,” he said, “ and I know it is hard to bear. Will you give me one promise ? You have been a good child, and have said prayers at your mother’s knee ; you have had a little child lying in your own arms ; will you promise me, by your love for your mother and your child—by your love and respect for the great God Himself, not to try again to take your life ? Listen, child, to those sweet chimes, look at the blue skies, take some little comfort, and give me your promise.” She raised her white face to his.

“ I do not see how I am to bear my life. I do not see how I am to live without him. The greatest mercy—the greatest

kindness would be for some one to slay me here where I am ; but what you ask me for God's sake I will not refuse. I promise you that, come what may, I will never take my own life."

"I thank Heaven ! " said the old man. " Now, child, listen, and obey me ; go home, and do not turn in sick shuddering from the helpless child who is there ; find comfort in it, love it doubly, because he who should love it is its worst enemy. Do you tell me in all sincerity that you will never touch the money that this man, whom you believe to be your husband, has settled on you ? "

" I would rather that my baby and I starved to death together," she replied.

" I commend you ; I think you are right. You will want, then, to work for your own living ? "

" Yes, I can work ; I was never ashamed—never too proud to work."

" You will go away from here and seek for the means of earning money in some large city, perhaps ? "

" As well that as anything else," replied the girl, wearily.

" Remember always, that while I live I am your friend. God sent me here, I believe, to save your life ; I must help you all I can. Go home now, and to-morrow I will come over to see you ; we will form some plan by which you may live, and live happily, I trust. Never say to yourself that you are alone and friendless, because, while I live, you have a true friend in me."

He stood up and raised her from the ground ; he held her hand in his.

“Courage, my poor child,” he said ; “life is but a battle, and the victor shall wear a golden crown. Look up through the clouds and the sky ; there is a crown waiting for you. I shall go home,” he continued, “and I shall pray for you. You will go home and learn life’s grandest lesson—endurance.”

She bent her head, and touched his hand with her cold lips.

“I am very grateful to you,” she said ; and then, as he stood watching her, with slow, uncertain steps she left the pretty green grave-yard where she had so nearly lost her life.

CHAPTER VI.

“FAREWELL, MY HOME!”

BACK through the evening gloaming, through the darkling shadows, to the home that had once been Eden, but would never be home again, she walked slowly. Her limbs trembled, great waves of pain seemed to rise, almost to overwhelm her, then to recede. There was the pretty garden, with its sleeping flowers; the shadows were falling fast; the rosy flush was dying out of the sky. From one of the upper windows a faint light gleamed.

Last evening, only last evening, at this very hour, she had been walking with him; they had watched the sun set; his arm was thrown round her, his loving words making sweetest music in her ear, his lips seeking hers with fondest caresses, his hands lingering on her wealth of golden-brown hair—she happier than any other creature living, in the sunshine and warmth of his love.

Now she must return to the home that would know him no more; she must enter the rooms where the sun of his presence would never again shine; she must take with her the knowledge that she had been deceived, betrayed—that he had mocked her while he loved her, that he had laughed at her

when he kissed her—that his love, his truth, his fidelity, was all one grand lie. He had simply made her the dupe of a passing wish for amusement, and she had given him her life.

“ I wonder,” she said to herself, as she stood at the little gate where so short a time since she had stood with him, “ I wonder if there is *any* truth in men? are they all alike—all treacherous, selfish, and wicked? That old man who saved my life, has he ever broken a woman’s heart, or blighted a woman’s life? Shall I ever believe in faith, in truth, in honesty again?”

She entered the pretty little house that had been so beautifully arranged for her; the sight of the familiar flowers and pictures, the chair that he had always occupied, the thousand little home treasures, stabbed her aching heart with fresh pain. She went into the room still strewn with the wreck of the jewels and ornaments, and again fierce, hot anger rose in her heart.

“ Did he think to buy my soul with such trifles as these?” she thought, bitterly.

Then a sudden sensation of faintness came over her. It was growing late, and she had neither eaten nor drunk since morning. Her strength seemed to have left her. She sank half-fainting on a chair, just as Hannah, with curiosity written on every feature, entered the room.

The girl looked at her mistress, and some instinct told her, not the whole truth, but something like it.

“Has the master gone away?” she asked; but Silvia made no reply.

“You look very ill,” said Hannah; “is there nothing I can get for you—nothing that I can do?”

“Nothing,” was the brief reply.

“But you have had neither dinner nor tea. Your dress is all wet with dew. Let me, at least, make you some hot coffee.”

“I can neither eat nor drink,” said the faint voice. “The greatest kindness you can do me is to leave me quite alone.”

The woman retired, and Silvia, looking round, said to herself:

“I would not touch the wine or the food his money has purchased—no, not to save my life.”

Hannah went up to the nursery where Jennie, the nurse, sat with the child.

“Do you know what is the matter down stairs, Jennie?” she asked.

“No; I did not know there was anything wrong; what is it?”

“I leave you to guess. Master was to be home for dinner; he has never come; the mistress has not broken her fast—where she has been I cannot tell; her dress is all wet with dew, and she looks like a ghost. The dining-room floor is all covered with broken jewels. I tell you, Jennie, there is something terribly wrong.”

"Have they had a quarrel?" asked the nurse; "most husbands and wives do quarrel."

"No; for when he went out I saw him kissing her, and I heard him say, 'I shall be back soon, my darling;' that does not look much like quarreling, does it?"

"Perhaps he has left her; no one knows who is who or what is what in this world; they may never have been married at all," suggested Jennie, with great calm.

✎ "They were married right enough, that I can swear, as sure as my name is Hannah Royden. I know——" but her words came abruptly to a close. Sylvia's white face suddenly appeared at the door. She took the child in her arms.

"I shall not want anything more," she said. "You can leave the baby with me, and, when you have had your supper, go to bed."

They would have remonstrated, but there was something in the white face that commanded obedience; they would fain have remained with her, have given her what poor comfort was in their power, have waited upon her, and made her comfortable, but the quiet dignity of her sorrow overawed them. They withdrew without one word.

But Hannah, who was warmly attached to her beautiful young mistress, could not rest; she went back again, and found Mrs. Rymer sitting with the baby on her knee, looking the very image of desolation and sorrow.

"Mrs. Rymer, let me do something for you," she cried, pleadingly. "Let Jennie take the child again; let me find

you a dry, warm dress, and bring you some tea with some cold chicken ; do pray let me get you something."

"I do not want it. I care for nothing but rest."

"Rest," thought the woman, "with those wild eyes, and that desolate, despairing face. I am quite sure there is no rest for her ;" but as it was useless staying, she went away.

A woman less pure would have been less proud. A woman whose conscience was not so true, so loyal, so delicate, would have suffered less. Many women would have said to themselves that they were innocent of all wrong, and therefore they would take what remained to them. Many good women, too, would have made themselves comfortable, would have kept the pretty house, and have lived on the money ; not so Sylvia Rymer. Her faith in him had been so perfect, it had always seemed to her that they had but one soul, one life, one heart, one interest, one pulse between them ; all that was altered now. If she was not his lawful wife, she had no right to his money : as for taking the wages of sin, the price of her honor, a bribe for her soul, she would have died a thousand deaths rather than have done it, so she sat still and silent in her desolation, waiting until all should be quiet ; if the little one wailed or cried she hushed him in a low voice, and as she sat there, faint, desolate, and abandoned, it seemed to her that the whole world stood still.

Quiet at last ; the voices of the servants had died away. She heard the door of their room fastened, then she rose, and laid the child on the bed. She went to her room and took

from the wardrobe the dress she had worn on the day she left home ; she divested herself of everything that had been purchased by him. In the pocket of her dress there still remained the little purse she had brought with her, and it contained a few pounds, the savings of her girlhood, when sorrow had seemed far from her as the earth from the sun. She dressed herself, and then looked for the last time round the little room where she had been so wondrously happy. She kept back the burning tears, she checked the wild, bitter sobs, she trampled down the wild, terrible grief that would have slain her had she given way.

“Good-by,” she said, quietly. “Here, where I have been so happy—here, where morning and night I have knelt to say my prayers, and have always prayed for him—here I leave my protest against the ruin he has brought on me ; here I leave my protest against my lost honor, my blighted life, my broken heart. Let that protest confront him in the day when he shall ask for mercy, and find it not.”

She took the baby in her arms ; it stirred with a plaintive cry, and she laid her trembling lips on its face.

“Do not cry, my darling,” she said. “You and I stand together alone before the whole world—we have only each other.”

She wrapped the little one in a thick, warm shawl, and clasping it in her arms, went down the stairs. One mute, wistful look at the pretty rooms, one farewell glance at the familiar spot, then she opened the door and quitted the

house. She walked rapidly through the garden; when she reached the high road she stood for one moment looking back.

“Farewell, my home!” she said; “farewell, my love! farewell forevermore!”

Then with a passion of tears she clasped the little one more tightly in her arms—she looked up at the blue heavens.

“Heaven bless us, baby!” she said; “we are indeed thrown on the world.”

CHAPTER VII.

"SHE SHALL BE MINE."

IT had been a cruel deception—a heartless, cruel case; one that cried to Heaven for vengeance; but one unhappily so common that the world does not even stop to sigh about it. A beautiful face, a pure, loving, tender heart, a simple country girl, as ignorant of the wicked ways of the world as of Greek, and a rich, titled libertine. How could it end? How could it be other than what it was, considering that Basil Ulric Vyner, Lord Dynecourt, had never in his whole life denied himself one single wish?

He would have asked you why should he? He was rich, almost fabulously rich; from his very cradle he had been flattered, fawned upon, cringed to, waited on with Silvia's adulations; he had never known a request ungratified, a wish refused, or a command disobeyed. The world was at his feet; he had but to speak and he was obeyed. From his earliest boyhood flattery and adulation had floated round him. Who had ever spoken the truth to him? Not his foolish, indulgent, vain, worldly mother. *She* considered truth as ill-bred and very unfashionable. There was no mention of it made in the training of the heir of Dynecourt.

Do such women know there is a God? Certainly, Lady Dynecourt never told her son so. He was taken to church occasionally, beautifully dressed, and amused himself during the sermon by eating *bon-bons*; there his religious training began and ended.

When he chose to desire a wish for anything, what was to stand in his way? Conscience? Certainly not; for he considered the whole world made for him. Honor? No; the only kind of honor he understood was, that he must pay all his debts at play. Religion? Less than anything; for the simple reason that he knew nothing whatever about it.

So that when Basil Ulric Vyner, Lord Dynecourt, saw beautiful, innocent, gentle Silvia Lyndon, he said to himself that by fair means or foul means he must win her. What was to prevent his doing so? What was to interfere?

The pretty, picturesque little village of Rosebank lies among the Kentish hills, and near it stands the grand, stately castle of Northen, the seat of the Earl of Northenden. Lord Dynecourt was visiting there, and riding one morning through the pretty little village he saw what he considered the most beautiful vision ever granted to him. A young, lovely girl sitting on an old-fashioned stile, that led into the meadows. She was making up bouquets of wild flowers. Looking, he saw a fair, sweet face, innocent, pure, and tender as the face of an angel; lovely beyond all words; sweet limpid eyes, bright and full of poetry; sweet smiling lips, a white and graceful

neck, and pretty white hands. A lovely girlish figure that had all the simple grace and poetry of childhood. As he looked at her, all unconscious of observation, the girl began to sing; the musical voice, so clear, so soft, completed the charm.

Lord Dynecourt swore an oath to himself, *and he kept it.*

He stopped his horse, and, bowing low, hat in hand, asked her if she could direct him to Catingdean. To have seen her beautiful confusion; how her face grew crimson with warmest blushes; how she rose from her seat, letting the wild flowers fall as they would. He was obliged to repeat his question before she understood it.

He pretended not to understand, so as to prolong those delicious moments, then thanked her, begged one of her flowers, and rode away. It seemed a very simple beginning to what was in the end a tragedy; but the prologue of a play does not always tell what the end will be.

A few days afterward the earl, with his family, went abroad, and his visitors returned to their homes, with the exception of Lord Dynecourt, who took lodgings in Rosebank, that he might the better carry out the vow he had made to himself.

He contrived to see Silvia often. He would wait whole hours for an opportunity of saying a few words to her. He made the best possible use of his time, but for once in his life my Lord Dynecourt was baffled. The girl was shielded from all harm by her child-like innocence. She did no wrong,

she did not understand it when she heard it. To her simple notions love was beautiful, heavenly, but it ended in marriage ; she did not even know anything else. She was pure in soul as the lily is pure in leaf. He propounded his horrible theories to her, the theories used by men of the world who wish to disguise sin in poetry. She heard them with a smile on her lips, for in very truth she did not understand them ; they did not alarm her, for the simple reason that they were like so much Greek to her.

Lord Dynecourt was baffled—baffled by her innocence, her artless simplicity, her unstudied grace and purity. He had sense enough to see that if he once startled her she would be like a frightened bird, she would flutter her bright wings and soar away out of his sight. He was obliged to submit to a charm he had never felt before, the charm of angelic purity.

“It will take time,” he would say to himself, “but I shall win in the end. *She shall be mine.*”

He enjoyed the change ; he called himself Mr. Rymer ; he carefully concealed his rank and title, and he learned more of life in that short time than he had ever done before. He, who prided himself on his conquests, who boasted that he had won more hearts than any two men, he who had but to look, and to conquer, dare not, positively dare not ask this beautiful, innocent girl to meet him unknown to her mother. He knew that she would not.

He was obliged to humble himself still further. He intro-

duced himself to the mother, Mrs. Lyndon, a simple widow lady ; he told her that he was possessed of some small means, and that he wished to marry her daughter. Mrs. Lyndon, who thought no one good enough for her lovely daughter, gave her consent, because she saw that the girl loved him with her whole heart ; and it was as Silvia's betrothed lover that he had the privilege of calling at the house when he liked, of spending the greater part of his time with her. How the poor child loved him could not be told ; it was as she said, her soul grew to his soul, her heart to his.

They had been engaged some time before he dare whisper to her that he was not quite what he seemed to be—that he had great expectations of fortune ; but the time had not passed unpleasantly to him. She was so lovely, so pure, so graceful, that loving her was to the experienced man of the world a novel and piquant sensation. He laid up a store of health during those quiet months that lasted him for some years.

How he deceived her she has told herself. He never hinted at the least difficulty on the score of marriage ; all he said was that his fortune would depend on the marriage being kept secret. If she had been a little more worldly-wise, a little more experienced, she would have seen through the matter at once ; as it was she never even dreamed of evil. The greatest wrong she ever committed was in consenting to leave home unknown to her mother.

But then, his arguments had been so plausible, he loved

her so dearly, and she loved him so well, that she could not refuse.

The rest was easy enough. He was charmed enough by her to live one year and a half with her in Scotland ; then he grew tired and left her. That was how—young, beautiful, and desolate—she was *thrown on the world*.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD DYNECOURT'S REFLECTIONS.

A BRIGHT May day ; the London season was just beginning ; everything looked cheerful, bright, and hopeful. The leaves were all springing fresh and green on the trees ; the birds were singing blithest welcome to the beautiful spring ; flowers were blooming, the pink hawthorn was shining on the hedges, the parks looked fresh and green. London wore the aspect of a city rising to a fresh life. Beautiful women, noble men, horses and carriages were to be seen in its magnificent streets and squares. There was a sound of revelry by night and by day ; theaters, operas, balls, concerts were all flourishing ; *fêtes* and grand entertainments were on the *tapis*. It was as though the fashionable world had just aroused itself to a new and more enlivening time.

On the steps of a fashionable club-house in Pall Mall stood Ulric, Lord Dynecourt. He was watching the animated scene around him, but there was neither interest nor amusement in his face ; there was something of scornful indifference, as though he had seen it all so often that he was tired of it.

He stood there for some short time, then went into the hall.

"Any letters?" he asked of the porter.

"None, my lord," was the reply.

Then the indifferent expression deepened on Lord Dynecourt's face, while the porter wondered why his lordship seemed to be always expecting a letter that never came.

Exchanging nods and salutations, Lord Dynecourt went into the great bay-windowed room where so many of his friends were assembled. He had gone there purposely to seek society, but there was evidently none that he cared for. He bowed right and left, then went to the great window and sat down in solitary state. He looked on the brilliant panorama flitting before him, but no gleam of interest brightened his face; only cool, calm, cynical indifference, that deepened every now and then into contempt. So he sat for some time in silence. At length he roused himself.

"What am I thinking of?" he said; "what has come over me? If it were not madness to suppose such a thing, I should fancy that I was looking back with regret to Lake Cottage. Poor little Silvia! I wonder how she took that letter? Philosophically, I should imagine; after the manner of women—making the best of it; enjoying all the solid comforts money brings."

Yet, even as he spoke the false, cynical words, the lovely, child-like face, so innocent, so pure, so gentle, rose before him and rebuked him; a thousand memories of her came to him—of her fair face in the morning light; of her happy, blushing, beautiful pride in the little child; of her loving, gentle, art-

less ways; her pretty, shy, timid caresses—memories that brought a keen, sharp pain in his heart, cold and worldly as it was.

“What has come over me?” he asked himself again. “I shall begin to think soon that I was in love—positively, truly, actually in love with her, after all.”

Silence again; and again the same wearied look at the bright scene outside, as by sudden contrast there rose before him the quiet lake, the pretty cottage embowered in trees, the sunlit garden, and the face that always had sweetest smiles of welcome for him. Then he turned impatiently away.

“I should not be haunted so much by her,” he thought, peevishly, “if I had an idea how she was getting on; it is hearing nothing from her that makes me nervous.”

As though in answer to his thoughts, at that very moment Mr. Gresham, of the firm of “Messrs. King & Gresham,” passed by the club window, and seeing Lord Dynecourt there alone, raised his hat. Lord Dynecourt made an eager sign to him.

“You are just the very man I wanted to see,” he cried. “Have you heard anything yet from Brae?”

“Not one line,” replied the lawyer.

“There must be a considerable sum of money waiting for her,” said Lord Dynecourt. “Has she never applied for any?”

“We have never received one line from her, my lord, good, bad, or indifferent.”

“But that seems very strange,” said Lord Dynecourt.

"I do not agree with you," replied the lawyer, an expression of something like disgust crossing his face. "It never was a case of money, if I understood your lordship right."

"No, no, perhaps not; but then money can do anything."

"Not everything; it cannot, for example, heal a broken heart or soothe wounded honor."

Lord Dynecourt looked up with a sneer on his handsome face.

"I can hardly believe that I am talking to a lawyer," he said; "a lawyer of the nineteenth century, too. 'A broken heart.' It is hard enough to believe in hearts at all, to say nothing of broken ones."

"We see a great deal in our profession, Lord Dynecourt. We perhaps see more of the real disinterestedness of women than you can ever do. We had a case not unlike yours left to our management only last year. A beautiful girl she was, deceived by the pretense of a false marriage. We were empowered to make the most handsome provision for her. She refused even to hear from us or to see us; but she starved herself on the step of her betrayer's door."

Lord Dynecourt's face grew very pale.

"How extremely unpleasant!" he said. "What a cheerful companion you are, Mr. Gresham. Have you made inquiries at the cottage?"

"Yes, but quite without result. The only information we could obtain was, that the lady with her little child had sud-

denly disappeared. There was a white-haired old minister, the Rev. Something Douglas, very much interested in her ; but no one had the slightest clew as to her whereabouts."

"Well, we have done the best we can. Of course, you will let me know at once when you do hear?"

"That I will, most certainly," replied the lawyer, as he turned away ; "and that," he added to himself, "will be never."

"She never can have taken the matter so deeply to heart as to have destroyed herself," said Lord Dynecourt, with a shudder. "Upon my word, it seems an absurd thing for a sinner like myself to say, but I do begin to wish that I had left the girl alone."

"You are looking very grave, Ulric," said a cheery voice. "What is the matter?"

Looking round impatiently, Lord Dynecourt saw the merry, handsome face of Captain Harry Fraser, his chosen, intimate, and dearest friend.

"What do you think they are saying about you, Ulric?"

"I do not know, and most certainly I care little," he replied.

"They say you are making yourself miserable over that affair in Scotland."

"What affair?" interrupted Lord Dynecourt, quickly.

"Nay ; how can I tell ? You do not trust me with your little secrets, nor do I care to pry into them ; only, common sense tells us that when the brightest star in our galaxy van-

ishes for over eighteen months at a time, that particular star is bent on mischief somewhere."

"If I am the 'star,' you are mistaken in attributing any particular mischief to me. I was tired to death of London, so I kept out of it."

"You know your own affairs best ; but there is a story going round the clubs of a pretty girl and a little cottage."

"Do not talk nonsense, Harry ; such stories are not pleasant. What if Lady Clotilde heard them ?"

The young captain's face changed its whole expression.

"You ought not even to utter her name, after talking as we have done," he replied. "Lady Clotilde is—well, to speak frankly, Ulric, she is a thousand times too good for you, Ulric."

"You would like her yourself," said his lordship, sneeringly.

"I should like to be worthy to mention her name," said Captain Fraser, with a deep flush on his handsome face ; "and that is what neither you nor I are."

"What humility ! I am going to call there now ; come with me, Harry ; you can do all the talking. I do not feel quite myself this morning, though I can hardly tell why."

"I shall perhaps be in the way," said the captain, modestly. "Lovers do not often require a third party."

"Lovers ! nonsense ! Lady Clotilde has too much good sense for that kind of thing. When once you have asked a woman to marry you and the day is named, what more is there to say ?"

Ah, what indeed? Suddenly before him rose the long hours he had spent in the green lanes of Rosebank, content to look at Silvia's face and listen to her voice. What had they talked of through the long summer hours? Love! only love! How he would have resented the intrusion of a third party there.

What had they talked of in that pretty cottage by the lake, hour after hour, as they sat on the shining shores, or in the sunlit gardens? Love! only love! and he had not tired of it. The music of that sweet voice telling him, over and over again, how dear he was to her; telling all her pure thoughts, all her bright, gentle, beautiful fancies.

"Ulric," cried his companion, impatiently, "what *are* you thinking about?"

And Lord Dynecourt, rousing himself, thought with a deep sigh:

"I must have been in love with Silvia, after all."

CHAPTER IX.

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE.

ONE of the grandest and most beautiful mansions in Hyde Park is called Stanfield House, the town residence of Lord and Lady Voyse. Every one knows Stanfield House from the magnificence of its architecture, the splendor of its interior, the beautiful view obtained from the windows, over the park. On this bright May morning a young girl stands at the open window of a balcony, looking shyly every now and then at the grand entrance gates. A girl fair in face, with a delicate, wild-rose bloom ; a graceful, noble head, proudly set on a neck of unrivaled whiteness—a head that, for statuesque beauty and perfection, might have worn the diadem of a queen. From head to foot she was a patrician. She had a calm, lovely, high-bred face—refined, eloquent, as though the soul shone through it ; a figure of perfect symmetry, full of curves and lines that would have enchanted a sculptor ; white, slender hands, with a soft pink flush on the finger-tips ; little feet, that might have worn Cinderella's slippers. If you had met her in an African desert, you would have known her for what she was—an aristocratic, high-bred Englishwoman. Disguise her as you would, she could never be taken for anything else.

People say that kind of thing is all nonsense—that in the country villages of England you find greater beauty than the higher classes can boast. That may be, but it lacks the cultivation and refinement. To those high-born English girls beauty descends cultivated, improved in each generation. The difference is the same as between a fair rose that grows wild on the hedges—that is blown by the wind and damped by the dew—and the garden rose, upon whose color, shape, preservation all the gardener's skill has been brought to bear.

Lady Clotilde Voyse was such a garden rose. The Voyses were one of the oldest English families. Her beauty of face and form, her high spirit, her noble soul, her bright intelligence came to her from generations of heroes. She was the only daughter of the present Lord Voyse, and greater care could not have been expended on her had she been heiress to the crown of a great kingdom.

From her earliest infancy love had shielded her from even the breath of harm or evil. She only knew one side of life—its beauty and brightness. She only knew one phase of humanity, and that was its noblest and best.

Dimly as she realized the fact that far away from her bright, beautiful world there dwelt untaught savages, so she knew that sin and death, sickness and sorrow were in the world; they had never touched her, had never been near her. More dimly still she understood that there were sin and evil; those she had never seen. What does the queen rose of a con-

servatory know of the faded flowers trampled underneath the hedge? Heaven shone above her; the love of father, mother, and friends surrounded her; she lived among all that was most beautiful and refined; how was the knowledge of evil or of sin to creep into such an Eden as hers?

Loved, cherished, guarded carefully as some most precious jewel or delicate flower, she had grown up lovely, refined, and intelligent; not proud actually, though from her face one would have thought it. Accomplished, fitted to take any place in society, no matter how high, Lady Clotilde Voyse was what Captain Fraser called her—perfection. All the instincts of her proud race were strong in her—she would have preferred any kind of death to dishonor, any kind of torture to shame, any punishment to untruth. She was the ideal of a pure and noble lady; not frank of speech, as was Silvia. She could never have clasped her arms round a lover's neck, and have poured out her love in warm words, as did Silvia. She was more reticent. Where Silvia would have wept aloud, Lady Clotilde would have folded her grief to her heart and have died of it rather than let it be known. And this girl loved, and was pledged to marry, Basil Ulric Vyner, Lord Dynecourt, who had won a woman's heart, broken it, and flung it away, with even more indifference than he laid down a faded flower.

On this May morning Lady Clotilde wore a dress of rich Indian muslin, elaborately trimmed with blue ribbons, that harmonized well with her fair face and soft brown hair. Her

white hands were filled with flowers—they were a passion with her ; she never was happier than when among them.

Suddenly, over the fair, high-bred face there rises a warm, beautiful blush. She leaves the balcony hastily ; not for worlds would she have allowed Lord Dynecourt to know that she had been looking or waiting for him. She went into the drawing-room, where Lady Voyse sat at her writing table.

“Mamma,” she said, “here is Basil.”

Lady Voyse looked up with a smile. She touched her daughter’s fair face.

“These roses are blooming in his honor. He would be very proud if he saw those blushes, Clotilde.”

The girl looked in her mother’s face with a wistful expression on her own.

“Do you think, mamma,” she asked, “that he loves me so very much?”

“How could he help it, my darling? Of course he loves you.”

“Sometimes I think he is proud, silent, and reserved. He talks to me, but he seems to be thinking of something else.”

Lady Voyse laughed.

“That is one of lovers’ fancies,” she said. “Lord Dynecourt has a proud, stately manner that I like. I think his fashion of making love quite chivalrous.”

The girl bent her beautiful, flower-like face over her mother.

“You know best,” she said. “If you are satisfied, mamma, so am I.”

Lady Voyse had no time to answer, for the two gentlemen were announced, and entered together.

If Lord Dynecourt had but understood the beauty, the grandeur of the love given to him, if he had but looked with a lover's eye at that beautiful face, he would have been a wiser, better man. As it was he remained perfectly indifferent; he never saw the light in those proud, frank eyes, lowered at his approach lest he should see the happiness shining there.

He addressed a few words to Lady Voyse, and then seated himself by Lady Clotilde's side.

The young soldier looked with longing eyes; he would have given much to have been in his friend's place. His love was worth that of a thousand men like Lord Dynecourt; but there was no hope for him. He was but a younger son—a captain in the guards—deeply in debt. Lord Voyse's heiress was not for him.

He was honestly and most infatuatedly in love with her. In other society the captain held his own most gallantly; he could be cool, sarcastic, witty, gay, amusing; in her presence he was literally dumb, content to sit and watch her.

The conversation was not very brisk between the two lovers. Lady Voyse had taken the gallant captain in hand, and was cross-questioning him briskly about the last review. Lady Clotilde looked once toward the flower-filled gallery, and

wondered shyly why her lover did not ask her to go out among the flowers.

"It is a wonderful bright morning," said Lord Dynecourt, at last. "You are going out, I suppose?"

to ride."

ould offer to escort her, but he never

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fingers among the blossoms.

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d the terrible blunder he had made.
ention that name?

She looked up again quickly.

"Silvia!" she repeated. "What a pretty name! But why do you call me Silvia?"

"Did I do so?" he asked, with a horrible feeling of guilt. "I beg your pardon, I did not know it."

"But why was the name in your mind? Do you know any one named Silvia, Basil?"

“No,” he replied, slowly, as though trying to remember ;
“I am not quite sure that I do. Silvia—no ; but I remember now why the name was in my mind.”

“Will you tell me ?” she asked, quietly.

“Most certainly. I read a story last night. What was it called ?—let me think—‘Silvia’s Lovers.’ I was very much struck with it.”

“Will you get it for me ?” she said. “I should like to read it.”

“I will send it to you to-day,” he replied.

She smiled brightly, perfectly satisfied. When he rose to take leave, she held out her pretty white hand.

“You like the name of Clotilde better than Silvia, do you not, Basil ?”

“Of course I do,” he replied ; and he laughed to himself as he quitted the house—a laugh that Lady Clotilde would not have liked to hear.

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CHAPTER X.

DOUBLE TREACHERY.

I HAVE to be married," said Lord Dynecourt to Captain Fraser, "and the sooner it is over the better."

The captain looked at the handsome, wearied, indifferent face.

"You take things very coolly," he said. "I should be more than half mad with such a prospect as you have before you."

"I am not given to raptures. I am thankful to say that it would require an immense amount to drive me mad."

"Well, there is one thing I *must* say, Basil—whether it offend you or not, I do not care; I would not be so indifferent, so used up, so tired of everything as you are, not even to have your title and fortune."

Lord Dynecourt laughed.

"I am not at all offended," he replied, "not in the least. In fact, I consider you have paid me a great compliment. I may say in return that I wish you all possible joy of your capability for rapture. I consider that a man has attained the chief object of existence when he is neither affected by joy nor sorrow—when, in fact, he has ceased to feel."

“But you were not always so, Basil. I can remember when you were excited about trifles, angry without cause, just like other men.”

“I was not a lotus-eater in those days, Harry; and now I am one of the idlest.”

The captain smoked away furiously at his cigar.

“As I was saying, Harry, it has to be done. I tell you in confidence, I consider the whole matter a most horrible nuisance; but it has to be done, so the more quickly it is off my mind the better I shall enjoy my life.”

“So it seems,” said the captain, dryly.

“A wedding in the country I could not survive,” he continued. Perhaps the recollection of country fields, and lanes, and flowers, was bitter to him. “I could not go through it. Villagers’ children strewing flowers, church bells pealing. I have not the strength for that kind of thing, nor have I the patience.”

“Which is more to the point,” murmured his friend.

“There is some dash, something lively about a wedding in town; it seems the very thing to finish up the season with. Will you be my best man, Harry?”

“Have you no relations—no one whom you ought to ask?”

“No, I have no one to please but myself,” replied Lord Dynecourt. “I shall go to Stanfield House this morning and suggest the middle of June for the wedding. Spend as much time with me as you can, Harry, until the event comes off. I have been quite out of sorts lately.”

As he said, so he did. He went that very morning to Stanfield House, and asked to see Lady Clotilde. He spoke hurriedly when he did speak ; his lips were hot and dry. Once during the interview he astonished Lady Clotilde by turning very pale and asking for a glass of water. Surely remorse was never busy with such a violent, heartless, cynical man of the world ; or had memory carried him back to that humble little cottage at Rosebank, and the sweet face that would smile there no more.

She looked timidly at him, her face crimson with blushes.

“Basil,” she said, gently, “do you prefer being married in London? We have such a beautiful old church near us, and a wedding at the Park would be really a treat for all our tenantry.”

“It would not be a treat to me, darling. I prefer the town.”

It was the first time during their courtship that he had used such a loving term to her. She looked at him, her eyes wet with happy tears.

“I will try to make you so happy, Basil,” she continued. “I shall learn all your likes and dislikes, study all your tastes, seek your wishes.”

She spoke so earnestly, so fervently—and such demonstrations were rare with her—it was like a shock jarring on each nerve when he answered carelessly :

“You are very good, Clotilde ; we shall get on all right, I am sure.”

Her eyes lingered on his face wonderingly. Was it only that he was reserved in his manner, or did he not love her? He caught the glance, and its wistful pathos touched him; he took her hand in his.

“There are different kinds of men in the world, Clotilde,” he said. “Some say more than they mean, others mean more than they say. I belong to the latter class. I have not the art of expressing my feelings eloquently, but you must never doubt that the feelings are there.”

“I will remember,” she said, gently, but she still looked puzzled.

“What is it, Clotilde?” he asked; “there is a question in your face.”

“I was thinking over what you had said,” she replied. “Basil, do not all men speak the truth?”

Her innocence, her purity, her truth smote him like a sharp sword. How little, dear Heaven! how little she knew of this world, wherein truth is held of so little account, and honor even less! Did all men speak the truth? What was he speaking when he sat there holding her hand in his, and talking about the time when she should be his wife?

All things are accomplished in time. Lord and Lady Voyse, who both cordially approved their daughter's choice, gave a most free and happy consent to the time for the marriage. They had known Lord Dynecourt from his earliest boyhood; they knew him as the peer of the realm, as a worthy nobleman, a large landed proprietor, a man with a career

before him that he might make famous if he would ; a man whose name was ancient as their own. They had never heard anything against him ; indeed, all that his worst enemy ever said, was that he had been a " little wild ; " and those words are interpreted by different people according to their disposition.

Everything was settled and arranged. Chilmes Royal was refurnished ; decorators, upholsterers, gardeners, people of all kinds were busily at work there. The future Lady Dynecourt's jewels were on view at the celebrated establishment of Horton Brothers. Madame Celeste exhibited the *trousseau* to a crowd of admiring spectators ; the carriages and horses were to be seen at Falcome's. There had not been so great a sensation over a wedding since the lovely Blanche Seymour was married.

The happy day dawned at last, the twentieth of June, and a grander ceremonial had never been witnessed, even in St. George's, Hanover Square. The very *crème* of the *élite* were present. A royal duke and a royal princess were among the invited guests.

The papers gave a long list of gorgeous wedding presents, a long list of the invited guests, an elaborate description of the superb wedding breakfast at Stanfield House, but they did not tell of the most touching incident at that magnificent ceremonial. It was when the traveling carriage stood at the door, and Lady Clotilde Dynecourt had gone to change her dress.

Lady Voyse called the bridegroom to her.

“Basil,” she said, “I have gained a son, I hope ; not lost a daughter.”

He made some kind reply, but Lady Voyse hardly seemed satisfied.

“I have given you this day,” she said, “the greatest treasure that I have on earth—money and lands are nothing in comparison. Oh, Basil, you will be kind to her? She has never heard an unkind or careless word ; she has been so tenderly loved and cared for. You will deal gently with her?”

The mother’s tears touched him as nothing else that day had done.

“I will be kind to her,” he said. “You may trust her safely in my hands.”

Then, amidst a shower of good wishes, congratulations, and blessings, they departed to begin that new life that seemed to Clotilde Lady Dynecourt like heaven below.

The treachery was accomplished, yet the heavens did not fall ; the sun shone on and the flowers bloomed fairly, as though no taint of sin or falsehood had ever rested on the fair earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FRIENDLESS WANDERER.

ON the very day that the wedding of the Right Honorable Basil Ulric Lord Dynecourt was celebrated, a solitary, desolate, heart-broken girl entered the great city of London, alone, and on foot. A girl half-crazed with despair—half-mad with the bitterness of her pain, clasping in her arms a little child, only saved from seeking her own death because she had given a promise to keep her life sacred.

A young girl with a white, desolate face, weary and beautiful, whose tender eyes looked in vain among the crowds that passed her by for one kindly face, for one sympathetic look. She was a woman, alone, and in a crowd. She met the usual fate of such a one. Some pushed rudely by her, others hurt the tender arms by knocking against her; some looked into the beautiful face with an ugly smile; some laughed, and some scoffed and jeered; but not one, dear Heaven! not one among the vast crowd gave her a kindly glance or word. She stood alone on the great bridge. Day was drawing to a close there, the sky was covered with great flushes of crimson, on the broad flowing stream there was a reflection of the rose-colored glare; little boats glided down

the river, noisy steamers went smoking under the bridge, the tall masts of the numerous ships looked dim in the evening light ; and still that great stream of humanity flowed on and on.

A great stream of men, women, and children ; of good and bad, of rich and poor, of rogues and honest men, until one's eyes ached with the never-ending change. She had found a place on one of the stone seats of London Bridge, and there, hour after hour, she sat watching the passers by. Sometimes the little child in her arms would stir and then fall asleep again.

Occasionally one, warmer hearted than the others, would look sadly at that desolate, beautiful face, and wonder what had brought her there ; again, some one would address a kindly word to her, but the white lips were never parted. She watched the crimson fade from the sky ; she heard the sound of innumerable clocks ; she noted the never-decreasing crowd, but she made no offer to move. Where was she to go ?

Far down the river the lights began to gleam. Suddenly there came to her mind some sad, sweet lines that she had read not many months back with *him*. They were sitting in the shade of a great drooping lime-tree on the borders of the beautiful lake, and she asked him to read to her. Among other poems he read this :

“ Where the lamps quiver
Far down the river
Houseless and homeless
She wandered by night.”

She could remember how her heart ached as she listened, and a shudder had passed over her ; she remembered, too, how he had stopped to caress her, how he had kissed her face, half-laughing, half-scolding, because she was so tender of heart and so sensitive ; the whole scene rose before her as though she had taken part in it but yesterday. How little had she thought then that such a fate would ever be hers. The tree was still standing, the beautiful, calm lake was glistening in the evening sun, but where was he, and where was she ?

A low moan that she could not suppress came from her lips, and a woman passing by bent down and asked her if she were ill.

“ Ill ? ”

She repeated the word with a vague feeling of wonder. What was physical pain compared to the torture eating away her life? Ill—why, all the illness in the world put together could never cause the anguish she was suffering then. She was not ill—only desolate, forsaken, betrayed.

She answered with such a vague manner—such an absent look in her forlorn face—that the woman thought she must be mad, and passed on.

Still that vast crowd hurried on, never growing less. Darkness had fallen over the city and the river ; the lamps gleamed in the distance like golden stars ; there was a low, sullen murmur as though the waves of the stream were rising, and then the crowd lessened. It was dark now, and

she had been sitting there since noon. Others would have remembered that they were cold, faint, hungry—not she; she remembered only that she was deserted and alone.

The great towers and steeples of the city loomed darkly before her; the myriad murmurs filled her ears. Where in all that vast babel was there a refuge for her? Where was a roof to shelter her—a face to look kindly into hers—a voice to shield her?

The dark, running river seemed nearer to her than anything else; the stars were shining bright and calm; they were reflected in its clear depth. Ah, what a refuge was there!—what peace—what oblivion! It was only to stand on the parapet for one half-moment—to spring over—perhaps one minute of agony, and then—peace!

She looked with yearning eyes; she rose, and something in the forlorn movement attracted the attention of the policeman on duty. She looked again at the river, then the memory of her promise rose before her like the flaming sword of an angel, and drove her back.

“Nay,” said a voice behind her; “you must not do that; life may be very hard with you, but you must not do that.”

She raised her white face and saw a policeman standing beside her.

“I was not going to drown myself,” she said, simply.

“That’s right; there’s many a poor girl—young as you—comes here for that purpose and no other.”

“Not I,” she replied, with a shudder. “I did not.”

“So much the better.”

Then he appeared to see the beautiful, white face more clearly.

“Why,” he cried, in astonishment, “you were sitting here this afternoon ; I saw you.”

“Yes,” she replied, drearily. “I have been here a long time.”

“It may be no business of mine,” said the man ; “but I should like to ask you how it is ?”

“I have nowhere else to go,” she replied.

A peculiar expression came over his face.

“I was not out in my guess, after all,” he said to himself.

“What has brought you to London ?” he asked.

She looked around on the dark river and the vast city. Ah ! what indeed ? Could she tell him that she had been deceived, betrayed ?—that her heart was broken, and she had wandered here, hardly knowing why she came ? No ; he would not understand ; she would not tell him that.

“Why did you come to London ?” he repeated.

“I came to find something to do—some kind of work.”

“And have you no money ?”

“Yes, I have some money,” she replied.

“Is that a little child you have under your shawl ?”

“Yes, it is a very little boy,” answered she.

“Then for the poor child’s sake you must go somewhere. You cannot remain on the bridge all night.”

She drew her shawl closely round her.

“It looks so vast and so dreary I do not know where to go,” she moaned.

“You have money—why not go to a respectable coffee-house? You could get supper, a night’s lodging, and breakfast, all for very little.”

“I should not know where to find one,” she said.

“I will take you to one you will like. There are several not many steps from here.”

“You are very good,” she said, gratefully. “I am tired, and I should like it.”

“You came to London to look for work,” said the policeman; “that is what every one does. You are a lady, and not accustomed to work, I should say.”

The delicate, refined face and white hands told him as much. She made no reply.

“Are you quite alone?” he continued. “Is your husband dead?”

• He had seen the wedding-ring shining on her finger.

“I am quite alone,” she replied.

“A widow! Ah, well, trouble comes to all of us. You must cheer up. I am not what people call a religious man now, but I never forget those words: ‘I am the God of the widow and the fatherless.’”

She started as though a sharp sword had pierced her. Did those words apply to her? “She was not a widow, because she had never been a wife; but Heaven knew,” she moaned to herself, “Heaven knew.”

They reached a quiet, respectable coffee-house. The policeman pointed to it.

“You go in there,” he said, “and ask if you can stay the night; then, in the morning, look in the papers; there is always something to be found—there is always something to be found. Take my advice—good, honest advice—do not go back to the bridge; it does not do for such as you.”

Then he went away, but there was a grave look on his face.

He had seen many such cases, and they all ended badly, he said to himself—very badly. She had such a beautiful face, so innocent, so poor, so girlish.

“What has gone wrong with her, I wonder? Ah! it must be the old story—a loving woman, a wicked man. I cannot think she is a widow; her trouble does not look to me like that kind at all.”

And, throughout all the disturbances of that night, the man's mind dwelt on that fair, wistful, desolate face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARTING.

SILVIA soon found herself in a most comfortable room, where in a short time she was served with a cup of hot tea. She did not know how much physical weakness, faintness, and hunger had to do with her feeling of utter weariness. A good-natured maid-servant came in, who began to admire the baby, to praise him, to call him all kinds of pet names. That cheered her. After all, the possession of that beautiful baby was a gleam of light in the darkness that surrounded her.

When the little one had gone to sleep, she laid it down and went to the window; she looked out on the busy streets, still so full of people; the noise seemed to reach her and greet her—to remind her that she was not alone in the world; then the clear heavens seemed to smile down upon her. After all, there was something to live for.

“I can work,” she thought, looking down on her little white hands, “and I have my baby.”

But she was such a child, so inexperienced still, so utterly ignorant of the world and its ways, so unversed in all matters of fact, means of life. As she sat there deciding that she

must work, she had no more idea how to set about it than the little baby sleeping so soundly would have had.

After a time she laid her head on the pillow, and slept too. She did not wake until morning, and then the cold, blank world lay before her again.

It so happened that the mistress of the house, hearing of the beautiful baby and its fair young mother, felt some desire to see both. When the time came for presenting the bill, she took it in herself.

Her heart was touched; she took the child in her arms, kissed the little blooming face, then turned to the young mother.

“You look very young,” she said; “and you look like one who has had a deal of trouble.”

“I have had most bitter trouble,” replied the girl—“so great that it has almost killed me.”

The landlady’s eyes fell upon the plain, gold wedding-ring.

“Why are you alone?” she said. “Where is your husband?”

There was a moment’s pause. Those pale lips had never spoken falsely.

“I have lost him,” she said, in a low voice.

“Poor child! I thought as much. And now you come here in search of employment—is that it?”

“Yes,” she replied. “And I do not know—I am so ignorant—I have no idea even how to begin to find employment. Ah! how I wish you would tell me!”

The landlady looked at her keenly.

"You are a lady," she said, "and, if you will excuse me saying so, you know as little as the rest of them."

"I am afraid I do not know much," was the meek reply.

"You could teach, of course?" said Mrs. Carson, with the least possible tinge of contempt in her voice.

"I do not think so—I am not clever. It requires great skill and talent to teach well, does it not?"

A dry laugh, that Silvia did not understand, answered her.

"Would you like to go into a shop?" she asked.

"I would do anything. I am willing to do anything."

"Well," said the landlady, candidly, "in my opinion you are far too good-looking to go into a shop. Your life would be a burden to you."

The beautiful face fell.

"Do you know of anything that you could get your living by at home—lace-making, or anything of that kind?"

"No; I am very ignorant."

"If I were in your place," said Mrs. Carson, "I would go to an office—there must be plenty in London. You might get a situation as governess to young children, or as companion. Would you like that?"

"Very much, indeed, if I could manage it."

"You could manage it well enough," was the hearty reply. "Then you have to consider what you would do with the baby."

The young mother's face fell.

“Shall I have to leave my baby? I cannot do that.”

“You will be obliged to do it if you wish to make money,” said Mrs. Carson. “But it will be easy to find a comfortable home for it—not here in London—but out in the country, where it can get fresh air, and good, cheap milk. You will pay so much a week, and may be sure he will be kindly treated.”

“Are you sure I can get such a home?” she asked.

“Yes; let me think. I have a married sister who lives at Hampstead; she is not too well off, poor thing, and she would be glad of a child to nurse; that is, of course,” she added, somewhat awkwardly, “if you can pay.”

“I will do that,” she cried—“you give me fresh life. Before I do anything else I will see about a nice home for my baby. I never thought of that—indeed, I have been almost in despair whenever I have thought of it, for I did not see how I was to get work with my baby.”

“You do not know much of the world,” said Mrs. Carson, kindly.

She, too, like the policeman, had been looking at the lovely young face, and thinking that the sorrow there was not like the sorrow that follows death. Perhaps some idea of what the truth actually was flashed across her; but she was a compassionate woman, and her heart was full of kindness for the girl.

“You have lost your husband,” she said, slowly, “and it has been a great trouble to you, I am sure. You were

hurried, I suppose, and had not time to get your mourning?"

A sudden, hot flush burned the fair face.

"I did not think of it," she said, humbly. "I was too much grieved even to remember it."

"I can easily believe that, for I know what trouble is," said Mrs. Carson; "but the rest of the world may not do the same. It is a cruel, hard world. Seeing you so young and with this dear little baby—hearing you call yourself a widow, *without* wearing widow's weeds—they would say uncharitable things of you."

"I never thought of it," she replied, briefly.

"I am glad I thought of it for you. Can you afford to buy *good* mourning? It would go so much in your favor."

"Yes—I have money," she said, slowly.

"Then, if you take my advice, you will do that the first thing. I should like you to do it before you go to my sister's, even. I will see that the baby is well taken care of, if you like to go now. All these beautiful curls must be put aside, and you must have a proper widow's cap."

The girl shrank back, evidently not liking the idea. "How *could* she," she said to herself, "how could she act so falsely?"

Mrs. Carson noticed her hesitation.

"You, perhaps, think you are too young," she said, "for such a gloomy dress; but for the baby's sake you must wear it."

"I will go out at once," she said, "and see about it."

A few hours afterward, when she stood before the glass, she hardly knew herself; the beautiful, rippling golden hair was brushed back and hidden by the widow's cap, the beautiful, girlish figure was hidden by the heavy mourning dress. There was no resemblance between her and the bright, lovely girl whose brief span of happiness had been spent by the lake side.

"That is right," said Mrs. Carson; "you look ten years older at least. Baby is good as gold. Now, if you have money enough with you to pay for him, better to take him to Hampstead at once; then you will be at liberty to look out for something to do. If you can arrange that I shall think we have managed very creditably."

"I shall be grateful to you as long as ever I live," said Silvia.

Then Mrs. Carson asked her name.

"You are so young," she said, "you look so friendless, so forlorn, it would be a hard heart, indeed, that did not turn to you."

"I hope I shall find others as kind; but I hardly expect it."

"God is good, and the world is wide," said the landlady.

That same day Silvia went to Hampstead, and found Mrs. Tate, the landlady's sister, a kind, patient, motherly woman, one whose life had evidently been full of toil and care; she was even thankful for the employment, and promised to take good care of the child.

“I am fond of children,” she said, “though I have had but little comfort with my own.”

They agreed upon terms, and Silvia paid two months in advance.

“Whatever happens to me,” she thought, “my little boy is provided for, for some time at least. It will be strange indeed if I do not find something to do, for my whole heart is bent upon work.”

She little knew how many others had in the same way every capacity, every willingness to work, yet could not find work to do.

The next day Mrs. Rymer went to Hampstead and took the baby with her. What it cost that gentle heart to part with her child only Heaven knew.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. THORNTON'S FANCY.

I AM going to the agency office," said Silvia, when she returned from Hampstead. "I do not wish to lose a single hour."

Mrs. Carson laughed at her eagerness.

"That is right," she replied. "You will get on in the world if you show such energy. You must not mind disappointments ; you are sure to have plenty."

"I shall not let them oppress me," said Silvia.

"You will get a nice situation, I feel sure," said Mrs. Carson, looking at her approvingly. "You see, you have all the advantages of youth, while that widow's dress gives you a look of experience. You will have to give good references."

"References?" cried Silvia.

"Yes ; that is easy enough. You simply refer to some one or other who has known you at some part of your life. Some one who is very respectable, and whose name is a guarantee for you."

"But," she said, growing pale and frightened, "I—I cannot ; I have left my friends."

"Surely there is some person to whom you can write. You must think it over."

"I know a clergyman," she said, doubtfully. "A good, religious gentleman."

"You could not do better," said Mrs. Carson. "Ministers always carry great weight with them. I wish you God speed on your search."

Silvia went, and the kind-hearted landlady watched her, as she walked down the narrow, gloomy street.

"Poor young creature," she said. "*She* has had a hard lot. Some one is to blame for it."

Something of the fortitude that contact of the world always brings came to Silvia Rymer; she felt nerved to meet and bear disappointment.

"That which I have gone through," she said to herself, "is so much worse than death, it seems as though nothing now had the power to hurt me."

She found the agency office. At first its size and extent somewhat dismayed her. She shrank back half-timidly.

"I must be brave," she thought; "brave for my little baby's sake."

Just as she entered the door a carriage stopped there, and a young lady descended.

In some fashion or other she half-stumbled as her feet touched the ground, and would have fallen, but that Silvia ran forward to help her.

“Thank you,” said the lady; “you have saved me from a very awkward fall.”

Then she looked up into the sweet, pale face with a smile. When once she saw that face her eyes lingered there and did not leave it.

“I am going to the agency office,” she said; “unless I am mistaken, you are going there too?”

Silvia answered, and the sound of her voice seemed to have some great charm for the lady's ear. They entered the spacious hall together, and were met by the suave proprietor, who bowed low as he looked at the lady's card.

“Mrs. Thornton,” he said, with great *empressement*; “I am most delighted, most honored; pray walk this way, madame.”

Then he turned to the girl by her side.

“Your name?” he said, briefly.

“I wish to put my name down on your list,” she said.

“An applicant? Will you go to the room on the right, there?”

“Pray stay one moment,” said the clear, sweet voice of Mrs. Thornton. “I have taken a fancy to this young lady's appearance. You know what I am seeking for, Mr. Loader—a companion—a nice, lady-like, elegant girl, who would amuse me as well as do what I want done.”

“I quite understand,” he replied, with another profound bow. “I have no doubt that we shall be able to meet Mrs. Thornton's requirements; our books are quite full.”

Still the lady did not seem satisfied; she turned to Silvia.

"I am difficult to please," she said. "I am not like other people; I am nervous and sensitive. I might see twenty people, and not like them after all; but I have taken a fancy to this young lady, and I should like to know if she is seeking an engagement."

"I am looking for a situation," replied Silvia.

"As a companion?" asked Mrs. Thornton.

"Either as companion or nursery governess," was the reply.

"You are seeking a situation and I want a companion," said Mrs. Thornton. "It seems to me a fortunate thing that we have met each other. Will you allow me to see this lady, Mr. Loader?"

"Certainly, madame. I am delighted that you should be pleased. There are a few forms that the lady must comply with. Your name first," he added, turning to her.

"Sylvia Rymer," she replied.

She answered every question in rotation. Then Mr. Loader led the way to a handsomely-furnished room, and left the two ladies together.

"I have taken a fancy to you," said Mrs. Thornton; "I can hardly expect that you will do the same to me. Sit down and we can talk at our leisure."

Mrs. Thornton took a seat on a sofa, and Silvia sat down by her side; she threw back her veil, and Silvia looked in mute wonder at her. It was such a wonderful face—not

beautiful, though she must have been pretty ; it was pale, thin, and worn, full of suppressed eagerness and suppressed fire—a face almost terrible when one contrasted its youth and the pain written there.

“You are startled at me,” she said ; “every one seems so surprised when they look at me. I always notice keenly the face of a stranger when I meet them for the first time, and the result is always the same—they look startled. You did the same. Now, tell me *why*—what is there in my face ? Do not be afraid.”

“I do not know how to tell you,” replied Silvia. “You look eager, but as though you did not want any one to understand why.”

“Do I—now do not be afraid of speaking the truth to me—do I look like a happy woman ? ”

Silvia looked at the worn, feverish face—the wistful eyes—the trembling lips.

“No,” she said ; “indeed you do not.”

Mrs. Thornton laughed a laugh that was not pleasant.

“Now, how can that be, I wonder ? I am young—you see that for yourself ; I am rich ; I have horses, carriages, servants, jewels, dresses in superabundance, and a husband who adores me. Why should I not be happy ? But that is not the business in question. I want a companion. Will you come and live with me ? ”

“Yes,” replied Silvia, unhesitatingly ; “that is, if you think I can be useful to you.”

“I want some one to read to me, to sing to me, to talk to me, to amuse me when I am dull, to bear with me when unhappy—some one whose patience will not fail.”

“I will do all that I possibly can,” she replied.

“Will you? I am so glad!” She looked pleased as a child. “I am sure you are the very lady I was looking for—so few people suit me. I was a spoiled child, and I have the habit of judging people from their faces. I like yours. I feel that I can be quite happy with you.”

There was something so wistful and appealing in her manner that Silvia's heart was touched. She determined that she would do all that was possible for the lady, whose unhappiness was written so plainly in her face.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHILDLESS WIFE.

YOU look very young to be a widow," said Mrs. Thornton, with a compassionate glance at the sweet, white face; "very young indeed."

"I lived my life early," said Silvia, with a faint smile. "I loved and lost before most people have begun to love at all."

A far-off, dreamy expression came into the bright eyes.

"Poor child—how different life is for us all. I used to ask one boon from Heaven. I thought if I had that, earth would be Paradise. It was given to me——"

"It was given to me," she repeated, "and the fruit I had thought so tempting, so beautiful, so fair to see, turned to ashes in my mouth."

Silvia looked at her in silent wonder.

"You think I am strange to say such things. So I am; it is my manner. When you hear me you must take no notice, I do not mean it. I am very happy. Why should I not be? Can you see any reason why I should not be happy?"

"No," replied Silvia, soothingly; "there is no reason."

There was silence for a time. Silvia broke it.

“I ought to explain to you, madame, that I am not quite alone. I have a little child—a beautiful little baby boy. But he is with the nurse in the country.”

“You have a child!” said Mrs. Thornton; and in her eagerness her eyes grew so bright that she positively startled Silvia. “A child!—a real, living child of your own to love! I never had one.”

She rocked herself to and fro in a perfect agony of grief.

“I have never had a child, and I have prayed, oh! how I have prayed for one. You know what the Bible women of old suffered—you remember how Sarah longed for a son, and when one was given to her, it was like a gift from God? Then there was Elizabeth, even in her old age, a son was given to her; and though they were Bible women, I do not think they prayed more for the gift of a little child than I have done. I have fallen asleep with the prayer on my lips; I have prayed all night in my sleep, and I have woken making the same prayer.”

“Heaven knows best,” said Silvia, gently.

“I suppose so—they say so; I cannot tell. There seems to be always a fever on me—a dry, hot, burning fever; and I am sure if I could once hold a child of my own in my arms it would go away. I would build a church—you smile, but I am rich enough; I would endow a hospital; I would do anything if I might have a little child.”

Before this great yearning sorrow, Silvia sat dumb. What comfort could she offer? what could avail before this great

grief? She wondered if this was what preyed upon the unhappy lady, but she made no comment.

"My husband loves children," continued Mrs. Thornton, sadly; "some men do. The sight of a child is like a sunbeam to him. They say it is only good men who love children. Do you think that is true?"

"I believe it," said Silvia. "I think it is an invariable sign of a good, kind heart."

"So do I," said Mrs. Thornton, eagerly; "you are quite right there. How good my husband must be. He tells me children run to him, that every child who sees him loves him. Sometimes when he comes home, and I ask him where he has been, he says—'To Lady Dainziel's, her children are so fond of me;' or it may be to Mrs. Enringham's, whose little boy calls him uncle. Then I say nothing to him, not one word, but I cry until I think my heart will break."

Then she sat silent again for some minutes.

"You will let me see that little child of yours, Mrs. Rymer?"

"Whenever you wish," said Silvia, gently. Then the lady placed her burning hand on the girl's arm.

"You must not think that you will be always miserable. If you will come to live with me I will see that you are happy. Now let us talk about business. It is six weeks and more since Mr. Thornton wished me to find a companion. I have been to so many places and could not see any one

I liked ; so that if you could come at once, I should be so glad."

"I can be with you to-day—or to-morrow," replied Silvia.

"Thank you ; and now for terms. Let me tell you money is no object with me, and never was. I have more than I know what to do with. Should you think a hundred and fifty pounds per annum enough ? If not, tell me what you would like, and you shall have it."

Silvia's heart gave one great bound. A hundred and fifty pounds, enough to clothe herself and bring up the baby "like a gentleman," as she phrased it in her own mind.

"You are very kind," she said ; "but I fear you will over-pay me. That seems a large sum——"

Mrs. Thornton laughed.

"You are worth more than that," she said ; "just to sit and look at your face alone, is worth all the money put together. You will come to me to-morrow, then, Mrs. Rymer, at your own convenience. I am very fortunate to have found you. I must go ; I have an engagement for this evening."

She held the girl's soft, white hand in hers.

"You will try to like me a little ?" she said pleadingly.

"I am afraid," was the honest reply, "that I shall like you so much, I shall never care to leave you."

With those words they parted.

There was some arrangement made with Mr. Loader that seemed to please him very much ; he bade Mrs. Rymer good morning with great accession of respect—a lady whose face commanded such patronage must be worth cultivating.

Silvia Rymer returned home wondering at her own good fortune. It seemed hardly credible. Two days since, she had been forlorn, hopeless, helpless, and despairing, longing for death to relieve her from the problem of life ; now the little one was well provided for, she herself had the prospect of a good home and an income that surpassed all her expectations.

She did not forget to be grateful, she did not forget to thank God when she returned to her lodgings. Mrs. Carson was struck by the gleam of color in her face, and the lighter and happier look.

“You have good news,” she said. “I can see it in your face.”

“The best possible news,” replied Silvia ; and then, seeing the kind landlady curious, she told her the whole story.

“I never heard anything like that,” said Mrs. Carson, “never in all my life ; it seems just as though Providence had done it on purpose.”

Then, with more delicacy than one would have expected, she began to make inquiries about Silvia’s wardrobe.

“Not from curiosity, my dear,” she said, “but because I know the world. You brought no luggage here with you.”

“I have none,” said Silvia, with a faint sigh. “All my worldly possessions are in that little bag.”

“Then you must buy two boxes at least, even if at first you put little into them. You do not know what a cold judging world it is. If you had gone to that house without boxes, there is not a servant in it that would not have despised you, and looked down upon you. You have a great deal to learn.”

“I never thought of that,” said Silvia simply.

“No; why should you? It takes many a long year to understand the world and its queer ways.”

Silvia sighed as she thought how ignorant she had been, how little real knowledge she had shown of life, how easily she had been misled. •

“If you would not mind,” said Mrs. Carson, “I should be very glad to advance you a little money. You can pay me when you get your own.”

The delicate face flushed.

“You are very kind indeed,” she said; “but I do not think I shall need it. I have a few pounds left. If I want money I will come to you at once.”

The rest of the day was spent in making preparations. It was the most fortunate thing that could have happened to her—plenty of employment. If she had had no work to do, no preparations to make, nothing to engross her thoughts and attention, she would have died, and this story would never have been written.

It was the opening of a new life to her. Once, when her sorrow first came to her, she had thought of going home to

her mother ; but when she remembered all the shame of the story she had to tell, all the humiliation to which she should expose herself from the comments of her friends, she could not bear it. Her mother—good, kind, generous, really religious, who held all sin, all falling off from virtue as something too terrible even to mention—what would *she* think of such a story ?

Better let her mother think her dead than know what had become of her. Better never to see her again than see her in her humiliation and shame. She would never look again at the green lanes and meadows, the garden and the woods. She had said “good-by” forever to that part of her life. And nothing could bring back to her that which she had lost.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. THORNTON BECOMES CONFIDENTIAL.

THE lamps are lighted in Mrs. Thornton's boudoir ; she has lain there all day, refusing to go down to lunch or dinner ; she would not eat nor drink. In vain her maid, who was really attached to her mistress, brought up one little delicacy after another. She sent them all away ; she was not hungry, and would not eat ; she was not thirsty, and would not drink.

There she lay hour after hour, eating her heart away, the fever running hot in her veins, her whole soul filled with tortures, trying to remember how it had been when wooing her four long years ago ; trying to remember all he had said, every loving word ; trying to think of every loving glance ; then stopping with a low cry to wish she were dead. It was growing dark in the evening when the maid returned to her charge.

“You have taken nothing to-day, madame,” she said ; “how can you live if you do not eat? You could not find a surer way of killing yourself than doing as you do now.”

She made no audible answer, but to herself she said :

“What did it matter? Better be dead than living, since no one cared for her.”

"If madame will excuse me," said the girl, "there have been children who have made themselves ill with crying for the moon. Madame is weak and imagines things."

"I am ill," said the poor lady, wondering if her maid understood that her illness consisted of a broken heart.

"Did you say, madame, that lady—Mrs. Rymer, was coming this evening?"

A gleam of brightness came over the pale face; in the entire absorption of her thoughts, Clara Thornton had even forgotten it.

"Yes, she is coming. It is evening now—it seems to have grown dark all at once."

"Let me light the lamps," said the girl, "and bring up madame's pretty tea-service; it will look so much more cheerful than coming into these darkened rooms."

Mrs. Thornton seemed suddenly interested.

"Certainly it will; light all the lamps, Felicie, and see that tea is brought up. Put some flowers on the table, tell them to send up some jelly, and something nice for tea; let us have some fruit—grapes, strawberries, peaches; make everything as bright as you can."

She was interested and eager enough now. The burning flush left her face, her eyes looked more natural, and Felicie, looking at her, thought how sad it was that she could not always be interested and eager.

"If she had but children," thought the girl, "she would have something else to think of besides crying over that good-

for-nothing of a husband. It would take a great many men to make me cry," said the maid. "If I were in madame's place, instead of weeping, weeping, weeping, I would just give him back what he gave me."

"I think, Felicie," said her mistress, "I will go and change my dress; I should like Mrs. Rymer to find everything bright and nice as possible."

The maid would have done anything on earth to have amused her mistress or pleased her. She took several dresses from her wardrobe. There was a pink silk that Felicie pronounced charming; one of green silk and white lace; one of amber blonde, embroidered with white satin flowers; they were so numerous and so beautiful—so little used, as Felicie thought, with a sharp pain at her heart.

"Mr. Thornton will probably look in before he goes out for the evening. He likes to see me in evening dress. Bring that mauve silk here, Felicie. How pretty it is—just the color of a violet. I will wear that with some diamond ornaments."

And although she had spent some time that morning in dressing to please him, and he had never so much as noticed her appearance by one look, she dressed again for him—all for him.

Felicie was thankful enough to see her mistress interested in anything. She managed to prolong the business of the toilet, and then, by some well-directed compliment, brought a smile to the poor, pale lips.

Then Mrs. Thornton went to her boudoir. It was so brilliant, and the light from the lamps fell on the statues and flowers. The table was a picture of brilliancy—the delicate china, the fine old plate, the rare fruits. Mrs. Thornton smiled as she looked round.

“This is comfortable,” she said, and before the words had left her lips Mrs. Rymer was announced.

Silvia looked slightly bewildered at the magnificence that surrounded her. The pretty cottage home by the lakes had been furnished handsomely, but there was nothing like the luxury she saw here. In the pretty little village of Rosebank such things had never been heard of. There, a substantial Brussels carpet, with a sensible suit of mahogany, was considered the height of grandeur.

She was too refined, too true a lady to show any surprise or make any remark; but she looked slightly bewildered and confused. Mrs. Thornton’s warm welcome soon set her quite at her ease again.

“I am glad you have come,” said the poor lady. “Let me bid you welcome. I have not been well to-day; I have been nervous and oppressed. I shall be so much better.”

When Silvia had been to her room, and had taken off her bonnet, she returned to the boudoir.

Mrs. Thornton was already looking better.

“Will you take tea?” she asked. “How nice it is to have some one to speak to!” Then noticing Silvia’s look of surprise, she seemed to recollect herself, and said: “A lady,

I mean. Of course, I can talk to Mr. Thornton ; but then, ladies are so different ; one feels so much more at one's ease with them. I like tea ; nothing seems to me more comfortable than tea taken in this way. But, then, Mr. Thornton never touches it."

"Gentlemen do not like it so well," said Silvia.

"My husband is so much sought in society," continued Mrs. Thornton. "I mention it lest you should think it strange that he is not more at home. I am an invalid, as you see, hardly ever well. I could not expect him to spend all his time here, shut up in my room, could I?"

The wistful eyes said so plainly, "Give me one crumb of comfort," that pleading face asked so entreatingly for a little consolation, that some faint glimmering of the true state of the case came to Silvia.

"You could not," she replied. "Men require action—they require so much more than women. The constraint, the confinement and quiet of a sick-room are almost unbearable even to the very best of them."

It was pitiful to see the gleam of hope and light that came into the sad face.

"Do you really think so? Of course you are right. My husband has such splendid health ; he is so strong. I do not think he has ever known an hour's illness ; he does enjoy life so much."

"You would not like to see him change that strength,

energy, and fullness of life for the weakness, the languor, the delicacy of an invalid?"

"No, that I would not, God bless him! Do you think that men, as a rule, are demonstrative?"

It seemed to Silvia that the whole matter was becoming clear to her. Evidently the wife was most deeply, most passionately in love with her husband, who, on his part, was most probably quite indifferent to her. Evidently the only way in which to benefit the poor lady was to console her.

"I do not think they are," she replied, as though she had been considering the question. "I have heard very clever people say that the more deeply a man feels, the less trace he shows of his feelings."

"I wish," said Mrs. Thornton, heartily, "that you had come to live with me years ago. I should have been a happier woman."

CHAPTER XVI.

A DISLOYAL HUSBAND.

SILVIA had been for some time in the house before any clear idea of what was the matter dawned upon her ; then she began to see that in this luxurious mansion, in the midst of society, in the nineteenth century, when such things are thought to be impossible, a tragedy was being played out. Then she began to understand the fever that seemed to burn the very heart of the poor lady to whom, day by day, she became more warmly attached.

The piteous way in which that woman clung to her husband's love, or to the idea of it, was more sad than any words can tell. How she excused his constant absence from her, his coldness and indifference, was sadder than anything Silvia had ever seen in all her life ; it was not the death, but the mortal, lingering agony of love. Better a thousand times had he deserted her. Had he died and left her, that would have been a sudden and terrible shock ; but this was dying by inches, dying of a broken heart, the most lingering and terrible of deaths.

Silvia learned to loathe the handsome, careless man who seemed to live only for himself, and never to waste a thought

on the sorrows of others. He had been very much attracted by her; the lovely face, with its sad expression, so young, so fair, contrasting so vividly with the widow's cap and the mourning dress. Poor Mrs. Thornton was quite cheered because for two whole evenings he sat with her; she little dreamed that it was for the sake of watching her companion.

"See," she said to her in the morning, "how attentive my husband really is to me. Of course, he likes society—he is so brilliant and accomplished; but if he thinks I am really ill, how good he is!"

And Silvia might have believed it, but that Mrs. Thornton expressed a wish that same morning for some hot-house flowers, and Silvia went into the pretty conservatory to gather some. While she was most skillfully arranging a bouquet of white and crimson flowers, a shadow fell over them, and looking up she saw Mr. Thornton watching her, with an evil smile on his handsome face.

"What do you think of my domestic reform?" he asked, with something like a sneer.

No answering smile came to the lovely face. Silvia looked up at him gravely.

"I have not the pleasure of understanding you," she said, simply.

"Do you not think I am a model husband, spending two nights together at home?"

She looked at him very gravely.

"I am afraid you will hardly think me polite," she said, "but I have never thought at all about you."

He laughed aloud. "I call that charming. So you have never given me one thought; that is unkind, considering that I have remained at home for two whole evenings so that I might see you."

She turned away, loathing him, and busied herself in finding some green leaves to mix with the flowers. He followed her.

"You will surely say a civil word to me after that, Mrs. Rymer? If I had a face like yours to look at, I would never leave home at all. I consider myself a connoisseur, and I have never seen one so lovely."

She was too indignant for words; her face flushed crimson, and he was weak enough to think his compliments had called forth that lovely blush.

"If you blush so beautifully," he said, "I shall always be trying to summon the color into your face."

She then raised her clear, sweet eyes to his.

"You mistake altogether," she said. "I blush for shame to think that a man who *should* be a gentleman can so far forget himself."

"How am I forgetting myself?" he asked.

"I am your wife's paid dependent, and you have no right to talk nonsense to me."

"But it is *not* nonsense," he retorted. "I do not think I have ever said so many true or sensible things in one day

before. You are—I tell you, and I mean it—you are the loveliest woman I ever saw.”

He stopped abruptly, for she raised her hand with a warning gesture.

“Stay,” she cried. “If you insult me by one word, only one word, I will leave this house instantly, and neither my pity nor compassion for your wife shall induce me to return.”

“What a pretty virago,” he said with a sneer; but he withdrew and stood looking at her from a distance.

“Understand once and for all,” she said, “that I do not allow nonsense of that kind to be talked to me. You have a wife—a good, loving, devoted wife—and you are gradually killing her by neglect. I do not care how angry you are, I am simply speaking the truth. You are breaking her heart, and you know it.”

“What a pretty Puritan,” he said, with a sneer.

“I believe that I can be of some little comfort to that unhappy lady,” she continued. “I have seen sufficient to understand what is killing her. I shall devote my time to her, I shall give her all my thoughts, I shall devote myself to her; but remember, I will never again submit to be spoken to as you have spoken to me this morning. If you care enough for her to wish that she should have a faithful friend, leave me in peace.”

“Quite a pretty moral lecture,” he said; “and morality is never so pleasant as when it comes from rosy lips. Well, it shall be as you say, Mrs. Prude; you shall be my wife’s

friend, and you *must* really pardon me if I say that I envy my wife."

She looked at him. He was smiling, with an evil sneer on his lips.

"I suppose all appeal to you for your wife's sake would be useless?" she said.

"I am afraid so, Mrs. Rymer."

"Honor and conscience, truth and loyalty, are so many dead letters to you, I am sure. If I tell you that your unhappy wife has not long to live, and ask you to make what is left of her life pleasant by being kind and attentive, by spending more time with her, would you grant my prayer?"

He looked at her in wonder, for the sweet eyes had suddenly filled with tears.

"If you knew," she said, "how much she loves you—how she counts the hours when you are away from her, and longs for your return—if you could see the wistful face, the pitiful eyes, you would not refuse. If I pray you, for God's sake, to be kinder to her, you will not refuse?"

He laughed, but there was some trace of confusion in the sound; it was not pleasant to hear.

"You are quite melodramatic, Mrs. Rymer, but I am afraid, even in compliance with your pretty, eloquent prayer, I can hardly alter my arrangements, and they are not of a domestic kind, you see. I am sorry you will not be friends with me. Good morning. I am quite in love with virtue when it takes such a form as yours."

She made no answer, only turned from him with a sick loathing, and a sure conviction that nothing could avert his wife's doom.

"How long you have been," said Mrs. Thornton, as Silvia re-entered the room; "and see how dependent I am on you; it is not really twenty minutes, and yet it has seemed to me an hour. Has Mr. Thornton gone out yet?"

"I think not," she replied. "I saw him down stairs."

"He will not go without coming to see me," she said. "Ah! Mrs. Rymer, make me look nice. I love to see a pleased expression in his eyes when they rest on me. Ah, me! how I wish that I were beautiful. He loves beauty so dearly, my poor Gustave."

She was silent for a few minutes, then began again.

"I have been suffering so much pain all night," she said. "I am afraid my face is ghastly, and he dislikes all sickness so much. Will you draw down that rose-colored blind, so that the sun may shine through it. And, Mrs. Rymer, where is my Indian shawl? Throw it over me, the colors are so bright. I might have one of those roses in my dress. Now do you think I look as nice as possible?"

"You look like a picture," said Silvia; and so she did, with that exquisite combination of colors; but the poor, thin face was ghastly white.

"Will you give me my fan?" she said. "I cannot tell how it is, but the perfume of the flowers seems almost to choke me. Oh, Mrs. Rymer, do you think I am *very* ill?"

What was Silvia to say? There was death in the white face ; in the dry, burning lips ; in the bright, eager eyes. She was dying—dying of love unsatisfied, that preyed upon itself and was eating her heart away—dying for want of affection and care that would have preserved her life at least some years.

So she lay and listened, but no footsteps on the stairs brought the burning flush to her face ; she heard the great hall door close.

“ My husband is gone,” she said ; “ he had not time to visit me. I am tired ; I will go to sleep, Mrs. Rymer.”

But although she lay still and never spoke, Silvia knew she was weeping the bitterest tears a woman can shed.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LOVE STORY.

IT was an arduous life, but Silvia found that its constant requirements did her good. She was learning the noblest, grandest lesson that can be learned—how to forget her own cares and sorrows in ministering to others.

There were times when she looked at Mrs. Thornton and wondered whether there was another fate in this world like hers. Then she wondered over the inscrutable mysteries of life—how it was that love was so often given in vain—lavished on the least deserving, and withheld when it would have given life itself. If this unhappy lady lying before her eyes had but married some one who would have cared for her tenderly, she might have lived and been happy.

She was sitting one evening by Mrs. Thornton's side ; she had been reading to her, talking to her, doing everything in her power to take her thoughts from that erring husband, but it was all in vain.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Thornton, "that every life, if its story were written, would be more or less of a romance. Would *your* life make a story, Mrs. Rymer?"

How old a story she little guessed.

“I can hardly tell,” replied Silvia; “it would only be the first volume of a story, after all.”

“And mine would reach the third; very soon the time will come when the last page will be turned, and ‘*Finis*’ written at the end.”

“You should drive all such mournful thoughts out of your head,” said Silvia, gently; “they do you no good.”

“But what if they will not go when you drive them, Mrs. Rymer? I have been thinking to-night what a strange, sad story my life is, but how simple and brief. If I read it in print I should lay the book down with a sigh, and wonder why such a sad, painful story had been written.”

“We only see half our own lives,” said Silvia; “the other half we shall know nothing of till we are in another world.”

“Why are there so many sad lives?” said Mrs. Thornton. “I do not believe God ever meant it to be so.”

“It is the sin and crime of men and women that make sad lives,” said Silvia; “one person suffers for another, one generation suffers for another, and so the tale of sin and sorrow goes on, and will go on until the world ends.”

“And my little story will be unnoticed and unknown in the midst of thousands of others. I shall have loved my love, and lived my life, and all in vain.”

“Not all in vain, if Heaven comes in the end,” said Silvia; and Mrs. Thornton lay for some time with her bright, eager, restless eyes raised to the evening skies.

“I can remember when I was quite young,” she said,

“that the chief charm of life seemed to be its endless possibilities—there seemed no limit to hope, no bound to dreams ; life was like space. Now it is all over, narrowed to a small point, and even that will soon vanish. When I was young I thought no one ever had so bright a future as mine, now there is no future. Mrs. Rymer, would it interest you to hear this story of my life? I have a restless fever on me to-night, and it would do me good to tell you.”

“If it would not distress you,” said Silvia, “I should like to hear it very much. I should understand you better if I knew it, perhaps.”

“It is such a simple story, there is hardly anything to tell. I was left an orphan at quite an early age, so you see there has not been much love in my life. I do not remember my father, and I was only seven when my mother died.

“She left me to the care of a cousin, Mrs. Flanders, who was a widow lady of very limited means, who was always very kind to me. I lived with her at Clapham. When I was ten she sent me to boarding-school, and I led a quiet, not unhappy life for ten years.

“Then a great change came. My mother’s brother, who had gone to India in his youth, and had, we believed, either died or forgotten all about us, was found to be a millionaire ; his fortune was enormous. He had neither wife nor child, and he died, leaving it all to me. He had left a friend of his, in London—an old Indian merchant—my guardian. The money was my own to do what I would with, and I, to

tell the truth, did not know what to do with it. My income would amount, they said, to something like twenty thousand per annum. Mr. Latham used to tell me jestingly that I must marry an earl and be a countess, but I only wanted some one to love.

“It was all sunshine and happiness until my cousin died. I was only seventeen, and my guardian said I had better make my home at his house for a year or two. Ah, me ! it was sad enough—no father, mother, sister, or brother, no kinsman to love—to live always with strangers, and I had, unfortunately for myself, a tender, affectionate heart—love was as needful to me as the fresh air I breathed, or the food I ate.

“Mrs. Latham was a woman who went into fashionable society, and seemed to live for that purpose alone ; she made it her one great study—and never wearied of telling me that she should expect me, with my youth and large fortune, to make a brilliant marriage. All that is commonplace enough, is it not, Mrs. Rymer ?”

“No !” replied Silvia, “it was a terrible thing to be left so entirely alone in the world, and a still more terrible thing to have such great wealth.”

Mrs. Thornton sighed.

“I did not think so then, but I do now. I used to tell Mrs. Latham that I had not the least wish to marry what she called well, but that I did fervently hope that some day I might marry for love.

“ ‘We must have no sentimental nonsense, Miss Hope,’ she would answer. ‘If you are not a countess it will be a great disappointment to me.’

“ ‘But although I had plenty of admirers, I did not see any one for whom I cared. Mrs. Latham used to lecture me until I was wearied.

“ ‘Why did you not dance with Lord Vavasour?’ she would say; or it would be—

“ ‘Miss Hope, do you know the *person* whom you chose to dance with *three* times to-night is only a clerk at Somerset House?’

“ ‘I used to tell her, jestingly, that it was very tiresome people did not go about labeled with their names, income, position, and expectations.

“ ‘One evening we went to a grand ball at the Mansion House—it was given in honor of some celebrated royal visitor—and there I met my husband—Gustave Thornton. He was introduced to me by some lady friend. You will not be surprised, Mrs. Rymer, if I tell you that I loved him the first moment I saw him, and I have loved him so dearly and so truly ever since—not unsought, you must understand. If he had not seemed to care for me, I should never have owned to myself that I liked him—never; but he won me. You, who only see him now, cannot imagine how dearly—he was like my shadow, and I—

“ ‘I can remember, even now, every loving word he ever spoke to me—every loving look he ever gave me. I can

remember every time I met him, every flower he ever gave me—every little detail of our happy courtship—every trivial incident that arrived ; they are all impressed upon my heart, and they will never fade. Sometimes I have thought I should be like Queen Mary, and that when I die his name will be round my heart.

“You would either laugh or cry if I told you how I loved ; indeed, I could not tell. All the love and affection that other girls give to parents, sisters, and friends, I gave to him. I had only him in the wide, wide world ; no one else, I believe. May Heaven pardon me that I worshiped him. Yet, you must remember, not unsought—never unsought.

“The time came when there was no room in my heart for any other thought ; my first idea in the morning was whether I should see him, how I should see him, and what he would say.

“I saw him every day ; he seldom called at our house, but in the park, at the opera, at all the balls, parties, and soirees, there he was, and he managed it so cleverly, too, that Mrs. Latham never had the least idea of it.

“‘I am not an earl,’ he used to say to me, with a smile, ‘so that I must mind what I am doing.’

“And while my guardian’s wife was scheming to obtain for me one of the most brilliant marriages in London, I was thinking and dreaming only of him.

“One evening we went to a ball at Mrs. Falronn’s, Mrs. Latham and myself. When we entered the room I saw him

looking for me, and after a time he came up and asked me to dance with him.

“‘You must say no,’ whispered my chaperon. ‘Here comes Lord Vavasour.’

“‘But I paid no heed to her. What was Lord Vavasour, or Lord anyone else compared to him? What, indeed? I placed my hand on his arm and walked away with him, leaving Mrs. Latham lost in surprise.

“‘I am not *quite* sure whether that was prudent,’ said my lover, with a laugh. ‘I am not an earl, and Mrs. Latham may take you away from me.’

“‘I laughed, and thought in my heart there was little fear of that; I would not be taken from him to be crowned Queen of England.’”

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNHEEDED WARNING.

MRS. THORNTON lay silent for a few minutes. "You are quite sure that I am not tiring you?" she said.

"On the contrary," said Silvia, "I am more interested than I can tell you ; it is a real romance."

The pale face brightened.

"Is it? I am so glad. I thought there was nothing romantic in my life. I must finish my story. That night I saw that Mrs. Latham was watching me, but I did not care. True, Mr. Thornton had not asked me to be his wife, but I knew that he loved me, and poor, untrained, ignorant child that I was, I would have defied the whole world for his dear sake. I danced with him, talked to him, went down to supper with him ; he held my flowers, my fan ; he put my shawl over my shoulders, and escorted me to my carriage, while Mrs. Latham preserved a dignified silence. Just before we drove off, while she was engaged in speaking to the coachman, he bent down and asked me for the flower I had been wearing all the evening.

"I gave it to him, and he kissed it passionately.

“ ‘Could you contrive to meet me in Kensington Gardens to-morrow afternoon at three?’ he asked.

“ ‘I *will* do so,’ I replied ; and he had no time to say more, for Mrs. Latham, without paying the least attention to him, ordered the coachman to drive home.

“ ‘I quite expected that she would scold or remonstrate with me, but to my surprise she did not say a word. When we reached home Mr. Latham was awaiting us. He looked unusually smiling.

“ ‘Come this way one minute,’ he said ; and we followed him to the library. He took a letter from the table.

“ ‘I cannot help saying that I am *very* delighted,’ he began. ‘I could not have been better satisfied ; and I feel that we have done our duty to our old friend’s child—you, my dear, especially ; and the result is very satisfactory to us. Lord Vavasour has sent a proposal for Miss Hope, and he trusts that she will consent to be his wife.’

“ ‘Mrs. Latham looked delighted.

“ ‘I am very glad,’ she said ; ‘I thought he would do so ; he seemed quite fascinated.’

“ ‘There can be but one answer to such a question, of course,’ said Mr. Latham. ‘Lord Vavasour is, I should say, the best match in England ; he is not only a nobleman of great wealth, of the highest position, but he is also of the most unblemished character. As Lady Vavasour, Clara, you will be one of the most enviable women in England.’

“ ‘Then I thought it time to speak.

“‘I am not going to marry Lord Vavasour,’ I said, quietly.

“Mr. Latham’s face grew dark. ‘May I ask *why* not?’ he said.

“‘Because I do not love him ; and I should not love him if there were no one else left in the world to love.’

“My guardian laughed. ‘I thought you were more sensible than most young ladies,’ he said ; ‘but I see you are just the same. You will think quite differently in a few days—perhaps even by to-morrow morning you will have altered your mind. Of course I shall not take you at your word. I shall let the answer to Lord Vavasour wait for a time.’

“I assured him that, let it wait as long as he might, I should never change ; but he only laughed, and would not believe that I was serious.

“‘No girl in her senses could ever refuse to marry Lord Vavasour,’ he said. ‘I cannot believe that you mean anything of the kind.’

“Then, seeing that I could produce no impression by anything I said, I went to my own room. Most probably my guardian and his wife had a long conversation about me, for the next morning I was sent for to the library, and found Mr. Latham awaiting me alone ; Mrs. Latham was not present—probably she intended giving me the opportunity of receiving a good lecture.

“My guardian placed a chair for me.

“‘My dear Clara,’ he said, ‘this will be the first time that

you and I have come into collision. I have always found you tractable, obedient, and docile.'

" 'So I hope always to be, guardian,' I replied.

" 'Then we must consider the matter about Lord Vavasour,' he said ; 'and at the same time I wish to give you a serious warning. My dear Clara, I have only your interest at heart ; I speak for your good, and nothing else—I have no other motive. Your father trusted you to me : I must do my best for you. Will you take advice from a true and sincere friend ?'

" 'That indeed I will,' I replied.

" 'I must tell you, because it is my duty to do so, that Gustave Thornton is neither more nor less than a fortune-hunter.'

" 'I did not believe it then, Mrs. Rymer, and I do not believe it now ; but the words struck me like a sharp sword. My face flushed, and I could not speak one word.

" 'He is a handsome man,' continued my guardian—'that much I admit ; but when that is said, all is said. I have known him in a casual way, on and off, for years, and that is all I know in his favor.'

" 'I know more than that,' I said, tremblingly.

" 'Indeed !' said my guardian, with a smile. 'What do you know—*good*, I mean ?'

" 'I know that he is the most chivalrous and the noblest of men,' I replied.

" 'My guardian laughed again.

“ ‘Why Clara, my dear, has it gone so far?’ he said, good-temperedly. ‘I had no idea of this. It must not go on. I know still more, child—more than I like to tell you. Gustave Thornton is a fortune-hunter, and he is something worse. He is a man utterly without principle, without honor, without honesty—a man to be dreaded and shunned.’

“ ‘Stop!’ I cried, angrily. ‘I will not hear one word more—not one word. You only say this because he is poor.’

“ ‘Nay, my poor Clara ; you are quite mistaken. The mischief is deeper than I thought. You shall refuse Lord Vavasour if you will, but you must get out of this danger. You must leave London at once. We will go on a trip to Italy, and you shall see the most beautiful cities of the world.’

“ ‘But I was angry, Mrs. Rymer, and would not answer him ; I thought that nothing in the world should ever take me from my love. I went up to my own room and remained there. Mrs. Latham came in to speak to me, but I would not hear anything she had to say ; and in the afternoon I went out to Kensington Gardens to meet my lover.

“ ‘Of course, I had cried violently ; equally as a matter of course, he asked me why, and I told him.

“ ‘Then he asked me to be his wife. He said that he loved me so dearly that he could not live without me—that he had said nothing of it before, because he felt the disparity between my riches and his poverty so greatly ; but that, rather than I should be made unhappy, he would risk all.

“ ‘The end you may guess, Mrs. Rymer. He persuaded

me to run away with him. I was willing ; and **that** afternoon, before we parted, every arrangement had been made for our elopement.

“People say that an elopement never prospers. Would my life have been different?”

“I need not dwell on that part of my story, Mrs. Rymer. I went with him—married him ; and now I will tell you how I have fared since.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“DO YOU THINK HE LOVES ME?”

WHAT a sad story it was—what a parody on human love—what a caricature ! This lingering death and blighted life was the result of romance and passion ; this long, slow agony the end of love that had once seemed immortal !

Mrs. Thornton finished that sad story one evening when a fit of restlessness was strong upon her.

“My guardians never forgave me,” she said. “Mrs. Latham never spoke to me again ; she would have it that I had most basely deceived her. She told every one how foolish I had been to refuse a nobleman like Lord Vavasour, in order to elope with a fortune-hunter. Oh, Mrs. Rymer ! of all my grief, that was the deepest, to hear my husband called a fortune-hunter ! I had two or three terrible interviews with my guardian ; his authority over me ended with my marriage, and he told me that owing to my having married without any

settlement, all my large fortune became my husband's without reserve—that I had no longer any claim even to an allowance ; everything was his.

“How stern my guardian's face was! ‘If you had consulted me about your marriage,’ said he, ‘I could at least have advised you. If I had found that you were bent upon sacrificing yourself, I should have seen that proper provision was made for you.’

“‘I shall always have proper provision!’ I replied indignantly.

“‘I hope it may be so,’ said Mr. Latham gravely, ‘but I doubt it. Your husband, I warned you, was a fortune-hunter. You knew that he was both spendthrift and gambler. He can make ducks and drakes of your money at his will—there is nothing to prevent him. No girl ever made such a terrible fiasco. However, it is done now, and all talking is in vain, utterly in vain ; I can do nothing more for you. The fortune that might have made you a happy woman I shall have the misery of paying over to a man who is unworthy of it and of you.’

“I told him, Mrs. Rymer, that he must not speak ill of the man I had married. He only sighed deeply.

“‘Poor child!’ he said. ‘I am sorry to lose you, but there can be no more interviews between us. Your husband has proved himself what he is by taking advantage of your youth and folly : that act alone has placed him beyond the pale of honesty. I can never receive him at my house ; but

this much I will say to *you*, Clara ; should the time ever come when my worst fears are realized, for *you* there shall always be shelter and welcome under my roof, but never for him.' I have not seen my guardian since."

Silvia knelt down by her side, and kissed the pale face.

"And those fears have not been realized?" she said.

"No,"—the pale face flushed—"and not only that, but they never will. I do not believe my husband ever gambles or bets now—no matter what he may have done."

"Then Mr. Latham should be pleased with him, and restore him to favor," said Silvia.

She shook her head sadly.

"Alas! that will never be. They say worse of him than that. They say now that he neglects me ; that he does not care for me ; that he spends all his time elsewhere ; that he only married me for my money, and now he has had that, is doing his best to kill me with neglect. They say all this of him, but it is not true—is it?"

"The world is always cruel," said Silvia. "It expects either too much or too little."

"But you live here," continued Mrs. Thornton, her anxious eyes fixed wistfully on Silvia's face. "You live with us ; you see what our every-day life is ; you have sense and intelligence. Forget that it is not long since we were strangers, and tell me—do you think my husband loves me?"

There was an agony of entreaty in the eyes raised to Silvia's

face. She was terribly embarrassed. To tell the truth, and say what she really thought—that Gustave Thornton, so far from caring for that restless invalid, would hail her death as a relief—would have seemed cruel to her—it would have been a death-blow ; and to tell so great an untruth as to say she had the least faith in that love, was more impossible still. She evaded the question by laughing lightly.

“Husbands are a strange race,” she said. “They have so many and such different methods of showing love. One man shows great affection, exactly as another shows great aversion. Euclid would puzzle me, so would mathematics and algebra, but nothing on earth would ever puzzle me as men do.”

Mrs. Thornton smiled, then she went on in the same mournful voice :

“You know I always think if I had a little child, Gustave would be so much happier, and he would love home so much better ; but that blessing will never be mine.”

Silvia did not believe it—nothing that she had as yet seen of Mr. Thornton gave her that idea of him. If he said to his wife that he loved children, and loved them very dearly, it was to add so much to her trouble and annoyance. Silvia credited him with this amiable intention, but no other. A selfish, cynical Sybarite to love little children ! there was nothing natural or probable in it.

Still those piteous, pleading eyes were fixed on her face, and she knew that the gentle heart was aching yet.

“You have not told me all your story yet,” she said. “If I am to be a true doctor, I must know all.”

“I shall be glad to tell you,” said the poor lady, eagerly. “I have often thought that I was morbidly fanciful and jealous—that if I could talk to some one else, and tell them what I think and fear, I should be much better. Now, you shall be my second self, and hear all my thoughts.

“We were married, and my husband seemed devoted to me. It was he who proposed Cleve House, who arranged my rooms, who ordered everything for me ; and I was more happy, ten thousand times, than a crowned queen.

“At first my husband would take me out with him everywhere he went ; he said that he did not enjoy himself without me. We went a great deal into society, and, to my great surprise, I found myself treated in the same way everywhere—with a kind of pitying kindness that I could not understand.

“Then—ah ! Mrs. Rymer, this was the beginning of all my unhappiness—my health began to fail. I cannot tell how it was. I had always been well and strong, and my strength left me. I used to have a beautiful color and brilliant bloom, but it died away. I tried my best to hide it, but it was in vain. Late hours fatigued me ; in crowded rooms I used to feel ill and weak ; talking exhausted me ; and after a time, sorely against my will, I was obliged to own that I was ill, and grew daily worse instead of better.

“That was how my husband first began to care less for home. A sick, ailing wife, I was no companion for a strong, handsome, high-spirited man. One of the doctors I consulted told me there was nothing wrong with me, but that I had exhausted my strength, and that three months in a warm climate, spent in peace and tranquillity, without the excitement of society, would in all probability completely restore me to health; but that unless I availed myself of this remedy, I should most likely fall into a decline.

“I told my husband, and he laughed aloud.

“‘Three months’ penal servitude!’ he said. ‘No; you will get better without that, Clara.’

“And, do you know, Mrs. Rymer, those words pained me so that I never spoke of going abroad to him after that.”

“It was unpardonably selfish,” interrupted Silvia.

“Nay,” said Mrs. Thornton, eagerly, “he did not mean it so, he did not indeed; he thought it was all nonsense; and gentlemen dislike all trouble of that kind so much.”

Silvia held her peace, knowing that the loving heart and gentle lips would frame some excuse for him even had he been caught in the very act of murder.

“If I had been always strong, everything would have been so different,” sighed Mrs. Thornton; “but night after night I lay faint and ill. I could hardly expect him to stay with me—could I?”

“That depends,” said Silvia, thinking in her own heart

that when he owed the roof that sheltered him, the bread he ate, every comfort and luxury of his life, to the poor lady, he might in return have shown her the smallest possible attention and kindness.

"You must understand," said Mrs. Thornton, "that all this time I kept my faith in him, and honestly believed that, though he might be careless, he loved me very dearly indeed. I never knew real sorrow and real bitterness until the time came when I doubted that."

"Did such a time ever come?" asked Silvia, quietly.

"Yes. I will tell you about it, and you shall judge whether I had any cause to be angry or not."

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. THORNTON'S DISCOVERY.

MY husband," continued Mrs. Thornton, "had a cigar case that he seemed to like very much. I have often asked him who gave it to him, for he had a fashion of touching it with gentle, caressing fingers, as though it were very dear to him. 'Who gave you that, Gustave?' I asked one morning, as he was looking at it.

"He smiled—not with his eyes, as people do who are amused, but with his lips—a cold, constrained smile, that gave one a terrible impression of falseness.

"'I cannot tell; let me think. I remember; I bought it at a fancy fair.'

“Perhaps I looked incredulous, for he continued :

“ ‘Why do you ask me, Clara?’

“ ‘Because you seem so fond of it,’ I replied. ‘You are always taking it out to look at it.’

“He laughed.

“ ‘What a happy wife,’ he said, ‘to have no other rival than a cigar case.’

“I took it up in my hands to admire the beautiful embroidery. He seemed restless and unquiet till it was in his possession again.

“ ‘I paid very dearly for that,’ he said. ‘If ever you go to a fancy fair, Clara, you will understand how.’

“Yet I could not divest myself of some uneasy feeling over it, and one day he came to me saying that he had lost it.

“ ‘Lost it I have not,’ he said ; ‘it is somewhere about ; but I have mislaid it. I wish you would give a look round, Clara.’

“So I went into his dressing-room, rather an unusual thing for me to do. I intended to look in his wardrobe. I did so, but without any success ; then I felt in the pockets of different coats. Mrs. Rymer, from one of them I drew out a letter ; it was not in an envelope, but lay loose in the pocket, with a photograph inside it. I cannot tell what impulse made me open it. I read these words—they are engraven on my heart, and will never be forgotten :

“ ‘My dearest—I inclose the photograph as you wish. So you have played the *grand coup*. Rather a bore that kind of

a girl ; still one must hope for the best. Write by return. I shall expect you to-morrow.'

"There was no signature but the letter 'E.' Now, Mrs. Rymer, there was neither date nor envelope, so that I could not possibly tell *when* the letter had been written ; but a terrible suspicion arose in my mind that it was newly written ; that the *grand coup* meant marrying me, and that I was a bore. I had no reason for thinking so, none in the least ; it might be a mere morbid fancy. What do you think ? Tell me honestly—do not be afraid of hurting me. What do you think yourself ?"

Think ! She knew just as well as though Gustave Thornton had made her his *confidante* ; she knew that he cared nothing for the unhappy wife ; and she felt equally certain that he cared for many others. Still the piteous, pleading eyes asked for comfort. What could she say ?

"You do not answer me !" cried Mrs. Thornton. "Tell me—what do you think ?"

"I am thinking," replied Silvia, gently ; "and this is what I say : that if I were in your place, I should most certainly give my husband the benefit of the doubt. The letter may have been written long before he ever saw you. There can be no certainty ; give him the full benefit of the doubt—generously."

The poor, pale, anxious face cleared.

"So I will," she replied. "Then, Mrs. Rymer, inside the note, as I tell you, there was a photograph. Ah ! I cannot

describe that—the portrait of such a beautiful girl, with a low brow and rippling hair, proud eyes and sweet lips—so beautiful, no man who had ever loved her could love me.”

“You do not know that he ever did love her,” said Silvia, gravely.

“No ; it may have been a fancy, idle as the others—it may have even been a fancy photograph—one the face of which pleased him ; but you could not even guess how it has preyed upon me ; no one could. Night and day that beautiful face has been before me. Let me confess all my jealousy to you. When he is away, I am always thinking that perhaps he is with *her*. I picture to myself that beautiful face—pensive, smiling, gay, bewitching, and—” she added, in a sudden burst of passion, “it is killing me ! It is killing me !”

“Still,” said Silvia, gravely, “it may all be fancy. Have you ever seen any one like her ?”

“No. And every time my husband speaks of friends—lady friends—I always ask the Christian name ; but I know none beginning with E who would be likely to write to him in that fashion. Now tell me, quite honestly, do you think it all nervous fancy of mine ?”

“I cannot see any reality in it,” replied Silvia ; “and nervous people magnify everything.”

She remembered it afterwards as a strange coincidence. That very evening, Gustave Thornton went into his wife's boudoir. She was looking brighter and better than she had done for some days—the result, perhaps, of that conversation.

She flushed crimson with delight, and certainly Mr. Thornton, in evening dress, looked pleasant enough to attract any one.

"Are you not going out, Gustave?" she asked.

"Not at present, if you can put up with my society for a short time; and if Mrs. Rymer will be kind to me, and not too severe, I shall be happy to stay with you for an hour."

If he had been a better man, the expression of her face must have touched him. She did not know how to welcome him enough, how to do sufficient for his entertainment; she would have laid the whole world at his feet if she could, while he sat, with a cynical smile on his handsome face, watching Silvia. Suddenly he turned to his wife:

"Clara," he said, "has it ever struck you that this great, solitary mansion is like a prison?"

"No," she replied. "I should sooner compare it to a paradise, when *you* are in it, Gustave."

"What a superabundance of sentiment you have. I think it the gloomiest place I have ever been in. What do you think, Mrs. Rymer?"

"Mrs. Rymer thinks nothing, and has no opinion to offer on the matter," said Silvia coldly; and Mrs. Thornton raised her head in wonder at hearing her husband addressed in those cold, abrupt terms.

He did not seem to resent it in the least.

"Could we do nothing to make it a little livelier?" he asked.

In one moment she was all excitement at the prospect of pleasing him.

“He wants to spend more time at home,” she thought. “What can be done to amuse him?” It was pitiful to see how the thin fingers worked almost convulsively at the fringe of her shawl.

“What would you like?” she said. “You know, Gustave, I would do anything.”

“Yes—yes—I know—really the house is like a great tomb. Suppose now we have a dinner party; that would fatigue less than anything else, because the servants can manage everything. We have an excellent cook, fortunately.”

“It would be very pleasant,” she said, with a smile—but her heart misgave. Weak, frail, trembling, how was she to bear the excitement—and yet he never gave one thought to that.

“What is the use,” he continued, “of this great house, and this retinue of servants, if we do nothing? I think, you know, Clara, that you have given way to invalid fancies long enough. A little change would do you good.”

He either could not or would not recognize the fact that she was past that—that the only change possible for her would be when her soul put on immortality. She tried to look pleased and excited; but Silvia saw how the hectic color came, and went—how the thin hands trembled—and the white lips quivered.

“Some friends of mine who have been abroad have just returned to England,” he said, “and I am anxious to show them every attention.”

But this time, as he spoke, he did not once look at his

wife, and there was a slight expression of embarrassment as he met Silvia's clear, frank, half-scornful gaze.

"Friends of yours," cried his wife. "I shall be so pleased, Gustave. You never talk to me about your friends. Who are they?"

"The Baron Jules Sievling and his sister, a widow lady; they have been abroad some time, and only returned to England last week."

"Will you make out a list of those you would like to ask to meet them, and settle the date?" said Mrs. Thornton. "Then leave all the rest to us."

She did not say to *me*, as she would have done once; and as she spoke she looked at Silvia, as though she would fain ask for her help.

"I do not want a stiff, formal affair," he said, "but something light and continental—bright, sparkling people—no Mrs. Grundies. I do think, of all the insufferable human beings, a dull woman is the most unbearable."

"Well, we will try to avoid that catastrophe," she replies, but her trembling lips show that the arrow has gone, as he intended it should, straight home.

"We will say next Tuesday," he continued, coolly, as though he had not just administered a mortal stab; "it will be something to look forward to—a little relief from the unvarying monotony and prison-like gloom."

Then Mr. Thornton rose, and, with a few graceful words, sauntered from the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGER RECOGNIZED.

THERE is something underneath," said Silvia to herself as the handsome face vanished. "Unless I am mistaken, we shall hear more of Madame la Baronne. How false his eyes are; he could not look at me—he never offered to look at his wife. There is more in it than we understand."

"Mrs. Rymer," said the weak, clear voice, "do not be angry—do not laugh—if I ask you one question."

"I will do neither," said Silvia, gently; "ask me any question that you will."

"When your husband was living, did he—did he kiss you sometimes before he left you?"

It was such a simple question, but it stabbed her like the point of a sharp sword. For one moment the memory of those past happy days rose and mocked her. He whom she had loved so dearly had never even left a room where she was sitting without kissing her, yet it had been all false—all utterly false.

"You have puzzled me," she said, recovering herself by a vigorous effort. "You forget what I tell you so often, that your husband is *not* a demonstrative man."

"He was once. What has changed him?"

"Men are like chameleons, changing every moment," said Silvia, lightly; "and there is no reason to be given for it, except that it is their nature to do so."

The grave eyes lingered on her face.

“Mrs. Rymer, you said your name was Silvia, and Silvia is a beautiful name. May I use it? It seems to bring me nearer to you. Silvia, do you know that you always speak as though you had some great cause to dislike men?”

“That must be an idle habit,” she replied, carelessly. “Now, shall we discuss this dinner party? You will like everything very nice, as it is in honor of your husband’s friends. Do you know that while he was talking I was arranging a very elegant dress for you?”

She looked up with some animation.

“Were you? That was kind. What was it?”

“A grand combination of blue brocade, silver, and pearls. It shall be a triumph of art, if you will leave it to Felicie and me.”

“That I will gladly do,” said the poor lady.

“Then you must rest well for a day or two beforehand, so that you may not be tired, but may be able to talk to your guests. You shall not have one care on your mind. You must leave everything to me—flowers, lights, and invitations. Do not think of one single thing, except that you are going to please your husband by pleasing his friends. Promise me you will not have one thought—one sad thought, I mean—between now and then.”

“I do promise,” she said simply and gratefully as a child.

Silvia kept her word. She busied herself in superintending every preparation for the great event. Tuesday came, and she looked round the sumptuous drawing-room with no little

pride. She had arranged the flowers and the lights so skillfully that the very aspect of the rooms was changed.

"We have surely had a fairy at work here," said Mr. Thornton; "or if, I dare compliment Mrs. Rymer, I should say a skillful and elegant lady."

But Mrs. Rymer did not even gratify him by appearing to hear the remark. Quietly, all the time, she was observing him, and she detected in him a subdued, triumphant excitement. Then she went to superintend Mrs. Thornton's toilette. Felicie had certainly excelled herself, and had called in art to help nature; the shining, graceful folds were so arranged as to conceal the painful thinness of the feeble figure; the soft, brown hair was tastefully dressed, and pearls interwoven in the rich coils. Did Felicie touch the pale cheeks with unrivaled bloom? At all events, Mrs. Thornton, dressed with the most exquisite elegance, flushed and happy at hearing Silvia's compliments, hoping to win her husband's admiration, looked prettier and better than she had done before.

"We had better go down to the drawing-room, Silvia," she said; "our visitors will be here very soon, and they are strangers to me."

They went down together; Silvia in her dark crape dress, with her delicately lovely face, a pitiful contrast to the poor lady who held her hand so nervously. Mr. Thornton started as he saw his wife.

"Quite a resurrection!" Silvia heard him say to himself,

with a sneer ; but Mrs. Thornton fortunately never observed it. She went up to him with a smile, and the shy, timid grace of a child.

“ Are you pleased with me ? ” she asked, gently.

“ You are very magnificent, Clara,” he said, carelessly.

She placed her jeweled hand on his shoulder. “ That is not enough to make me happy, Gustave,” she said. “ Are you *pleased* with me ? ”

It was not her pretty pathos, but the flaming indignation he saw in Silvia’s face, that made him speak kindly to her.

“ You look very nice,” he said, and he kissed her lightly, carelessly, on the forehead. Still, it was a caress to her, and she turned away, poor, loving, deluded child, with a rapturous smile.

“ I felt sure this was going to be a happy day,” she said ; and Silvia could have wept with sheer pity for her.

“ Gustave,” said Mrs. Thornton, “ I wish you would tell me something about our visitors. I am afraid I shall be strange and ill at ease.”

But before he had time to reply the drawing-room door was opened, and the footman announced “ Monsieur le Baron Sievling,” and the next moment, “ Madame la Baronne von Faiteuil.”

Mr. Thornton went forward with an air of great cordiality to receive the visitors. A slight cry from Mrs. Thornton caused Silvia to look at her. She had sunk back, white, faint, and trembling, in her chair. Silvia went up to her quickly.

"Are you ill?" she asked. The sad eyes were raised to her face.

"Silvia," said Mrs. Thornton, in a faint whisper, "*that is the lady of the photograph?*"

"Never mind, it will not do to give way; there is nothing in it. Try to stand up."

"I must ask Madame la Baronne to pardon my wife," said Mr. Thornton, in his calm voice; "she is a great invalid, and the least exertion is too much for her."

The look he gave his unfortunate wife had much tender consideration in it. Madame la Baronne was all grace, sweetness, and suavity. She took a seat by the poor wife's side, and commenced a string of tender inquiries about her health, while Silvia, listening, loathed and hated the false, cruel man who had brought this new form of suffering to his unhappy wife.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TORTURED HEART.

THE arrival of the other guests put an end to a scene that, notwithstanding all the efforts of Madame von Faiteuil, was becoming painful. Mrs. Thornton had evidently made a desperate attempt to recover herself, but her physical strength had failed her; she could not recover that, and to all Madame la Baronne's graceful platitudes she had no answer.

There never was a greater contrast than between the two ladies. Madame was gorgeously beautiful, with the low-browed, voluptuous beauty of a Greek goddess. Her face was magnificent, the features perfect, the coloring exquisite ; the brilliant eyes gleamed with humor that was half scorn ; the proud, peerless lips were haughty even in their smiles. Her dress was perfect as herself—costly black velvet cut so as to show the white, shapely shoulders, the gracefully-arched neck, and swanlike throat ; the white, rounded arms were bare to the shoulders, where the velvet was fastened with a diamond knot and a fall of rich white lace. In the glossy coils of hair madame wore a pomegranate blossom with a few diamonds.

The queenly, richly-colored beauty contrasted highly with the nervous, feverish, restless invalid by her side. Mrs. Thornton had looked very nice when she first entered the room, but now all her good looks had vanished ; the brightness so indicative of mental unrest had come into her eyes, a hectic flush burned on the delicate face, her lips grew dry and hot. To those who had never seen her before, those symptoms might have been taken as indications of health ; Silvia knew that they meant more than ordinary pain.

The whole of the party had arrived, and Mr. Thornton offered his arm to Madame la Baronne. She was evidently, in his eyes, the guest of the evening. As he passed by his wife he bent over her. To a careless observer it would have seemed that he was making some inquiry ; but Silvia heard the harsh whisper :

“Do, for goodness’ sake, try to smile, Clara. You look like a death’s head at a feast. What will people think of you?”

Perhaps the unfeeling coldness of the words piqued her; or perhaps despair did what nothing else could have done—aroused her. She tried to talk and to smile, but nothing more pitiful could be imagined. Silvia’s only consolation was that no one understood the scene save herself.

Then they went to dinner. How many admiring eyes were bent on that delicately-beautiful face of Silvia’s. She never knew it; forgot all about herself in watching the tragedy of that sorely-wounded heart that was slowly breaking. Dinner passed over better than she had dared to hope. Mrs. Thornton was a graceful, self-possessed hostess now that she had recovered from the immediate shock, and Silvia remained near her, assisting her by every means in her power. The dinner was certainly a great success, and Mr. Thornton’s smile became most amiable and generous long before it was ended.

Then the ladies went away; but here the task of entertaining became easier. Madame la Baronne never even affected to take the least interest in any of her own sex, she never made any effort toward entertaining them; she sank back in the easy depth of a very luxurious chair, and closed her eyes. The other ladies gathered in little groups to discuss children and servants.

Silvia persuaded Mrs. Thornton to follow the example of madame, and rest until the gentlemen entered.

“I will go to the piano,” she said, “and that will give you an opportunity of resting.”

But it was not long before the gentlemen came in, and then it was wonderful to see the change that came over madame. It was like one suddenly animated by a new soul; all trace of languor disappeared. Her eyes shone, her ruby lips were parted with a proud smile. Mr. Thornton went to her and sat down by her side.

Mons. le Baron challenged Mrs. Thornton to a game at chess; she was unwilling at first, for her evident desire was to watch her husband and his beautiful companion; but at the first word of refusal Mr. Thornton looked up sharply.

“Oblige the baron, Clara,” he said; “you play an excellent game.”

Her face flushed, but she obeyed him.

Then one of the young ladies who had gone to the piano asked for a particular song, and, knowing that it was among the music, Silvia turned away to look for it.

The stand containing the music had been taken from its usual place, and to reach it Silvia had to stand immediately behind the large lounging-chair, that quite concealed her from all observation.

Madame was talking in a low, earnest voice to Mr. Thornton. Suddenly she held up one white finger warningly to him.

“How clever you are,” she said. “You never told me what a lovely girl your wife’s companion was.”

“Did I not? Then it must have been because you are so lovely yourself, that in your presence I cannot remember anything else.”

“An easy way of getting out of a difficulty. But, Gustave, who is she? There is something so delicately beautiful about her. What did you tell me her name was—Rymer? I do not recognize it; she is nobody, of course, but if I had that face——”

“*You*,” he interrupted. “Why, your own is worth a thousand of it.”

“Flatterer. So home is *not* dull after all, illumined by that most graceful presence.”

“I am no favorite of Mrs. Rymer’s,” he said, “she is prudery itself.”

“Then look out for a history,” said madame, quickly. “I never yet met one woman pretending to be so much better than the rest, who did not prove in the end to be rather worse.”

“But Mrs. Rymer does not really like me,” he said; “*she told me so*.”

“Ah! then you must have asked her. She would not have volunteered such information, I am sure. Confess at once.”

“No,” he replied carelessly. “As you imagine, one is glad of any little distraction here. I merely offered a few compliments, but they were so badly received, I never ventured upon another. To tell the truth,” he continued,

laughingly, "I thought she displayed very bad taste, and she ceased entirely to be even interesting to me."

Then some words followed, spoken in a lower tone of voice ; all that Silvia heard was madame saying :

"But you told me she was dying."

"So she is," he replied, "there is no mistake about it."

"She does not *look* like it," said madame, incredulously.

"You see her now at her best ; but I assure you that if she is alive in six months' time, I shall be greatly astonished."

"Nothing can save her, then," said madame, carelessly.

"I do not know ; some think that wintering in a warm climate might be beneficial. I believe that if I made myself into a slave, waited upon her night and day, and, in fact, made myself miserable over her, I have an idea that she would recover ; but I do not intend doing anything of the kind."

"And then—" said madame, but Silvia heard no more. Such bitter loathing came over her that she shuddered as with mortal dread ; she forgot the song she had come in search of. She went away, out into the cool conservatory, where the burning fire of her anger and indignation would not betray her.

It was just as she had suspected all along. He had married the poor girl for her money ; he had not the least liking for her in his heart, and now that her ill-health and evident unhappiness wearied him, he positively hated her ; and because

of this hatred he refused her the love and kindness, the care and attention that might have saved her.

He knew that his coldness, his evident dislike, was breaking her heart, yet he would give her nothing else. He knew that if he would devote himself to her, if he would lavish all love and tenderness upon her, if he would take her abroad to fairer and more sunny climes, he knew that she would in all human probability live years longer; and because he knew all this, he purposely refrained from all show of kindness or affection, he would give none of it. He was all she had in the world, and he purposely tortured her weak, gentle, loving heart by every careless slight he could inflict upon her. He studied how to grieve and sadden her. Some women, stronger in body and in mind, would have risen up in fierce rebellion against this; she did not. It was killing her, and she had no power to help herself.

“I wonder,” said Silvia to herself, “which is the worst, the man who drops slow poison into his wife’s food, who stabs her, who drowns her, or the man who coldly, deliberately, unseen and unguessed by others, calmly breaks his wife’s heart?”

She was obliged to trample down the hot indignation that had almost mastered her. She would have liked very much to have returned to that gorgeous drawing-room and have exposed him to all present; but all such thoughts were useless. She did go back, when the warm flush had died from her face, and she found Mrs. Thornton still playing at

chess, and Madame la Baronne still engrossing the master of the house. Silvia watched her as she would have done some wondrously beautiful serpent; but as she watched she was obliged to own to herself that in no other woman had she ever seen such beauty and such grace.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

A FEW days had elapsed since the dinner party, and Silvia stood watching the clouds that sailed in such royal triumph over the face of the heavens.

Since that evening Mrs. Thornton had grown slowly worse and worse. She had hardly seen anything of her husband; he was away from the house the whole day, and no one but himself knew at what time of the night he returned.

In her poor, plaintive way, Mrs. Thornton had made some slight protest against her rival. On the same evening, after the last of their visitors had gone, and the three, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, with Silvia, were in the drawing-room alone, she had said to him :

“I hope everything has been to your satisfaction, Gustave?”

“It was all right,” he said; “there was nothing out of the way. We have a good cellar and a good cook; no dinner party can be quite a failure where those two are combined.”

He might have given her a word of praise for her evident anxiety to please him, but he had no such intention.

“I must say *one* thing,” he added, “that I never in all my life saw a woman so remiss as you, Clara. I declare that you made me feel ashamed of myself.”

“Why?” she asked, slowly.

“Because you received Madame la Baronne in so strange a manner. May I ask, Clara, why you did so?” -

She either would not, or dare not, tell him of the photograph.

“I do not like Madame Faiteuil,” she said, gravely.

“I should be surprised if you did,” he replied, with a sneer. “La Baronne is a brilliant, beautiful woman. She shines the brightest star in the highest society. A pious washerwoman would be more in your style, I should imagine.”

“Nay, Gustave, I do not quite deserve that! But madame does not seem to me *true*; there is something mocking in her smile—something false even in her kindest words.”

He shrugged his shoulders with an affectation of greatest patience.

“We never did agree,” he said, “and I suppose we never shall. It seems strange, though, that I like your friends no better than you like mine. If you want a model for grace, for vivacity, for animation, cultivate Madame von Faiteuil.”

And with that parting shot he left his wife's room, where he did not appear again for many a long day.

There came a bright, sunshiny morning, warm and fragrant,

when Mrs. Thornton raised her pale face from the pillow, and said :

“ Silvia, I would give anything for a drive this afternoon. Will you ask Mr. Thornton as he goes down stairs just to step in here? ”

Silvia did as she was desired. She opened the door as Mr. Thornton was passing, and told him how delighted his wife would be to see him for a minute.

An expression of impatience and vexation came over his face.

“ What does she want? ” he asked, quickly. “ I have no time to spare. ”

But Silvia wisely retreated without answering the question, and he was compelled to follow her into the room. His wife raised her pale face and wearied eyes.

“ How well you look, Gustave ! ” she said ; and the remark was not uncalled for—he did look wonderfully well. There was a slight flush on his handsome face, his dress was most faultless in style, and he carried a costly and beautiful flower. No one looking at that handsome exterior could have believed that he was deliberately breaking a woman’s heart.

“ What a beautiful flower ! ” said his wife.

“ You did not send for me, I presume, to tell me that I looked well, and had a nice flower? ” he said, impatiently. “ What is it you want? ”

“ The day is so lovely, ” said Mrs. Thornton, “ I thought you would perhaps drive me out for a short time this afternoon. ”

He made no answer, and Silvia, fearing for the effect upon her if she saw the vexation so plainly expressed, came up to him ; her lovely face, with its pleading smile, would have touched any man's heart.

“ If you can find leisure,” she said, “ it would do Mrs. Thornton more good than all the medicine in the world.”

He smiled at her most graciously, then turned to his wife.

“ I am very sorry,” he said ; “ it happens most unfortunately ; but I have promised to go out of town to-day with a party of friends. If it were not for that I would go with pleasure ; some other day, let us hope.”

And nodding carelessly, he quitted the room. She did not cry, as she would once have done ; but an additional shade of despair came over her face as she laid her head back on the pillows.

“ You need not be disappointed,” said Silvia. “ You can go out just the same, although you will not have the advantage of Mr. Thornton's driving. Let me order the carriage for you after lunch, and I will go with you ; then I can take the best possible care of you.”

She refused at first, but Silvia, standing by the window, gave her such a glowing account of the sun, the white, fleecy clouds, and the warm, sweet, western winds, that at last she consented.

It was while she stood there watching the clouds that Silvia's thoughts wandered.

“There *must* be good men,” she thought: “there have been heroes, martyrs, saints; apostles; there must be good men. How is it that my experience of them has been so unfortunate? I can think of nothing more noble, more god-like, than a good man, a true, loyal, honest, good man, and yet those I have known have been bad.”

She saw how terribly Mrs. Thornton felt her husband’s unkindness, and she did her best to cheer her.

After lunch the carriage was brought round, the invalid lady was carefully wrapped up, and she went into the park. The fresh air and the sunshine seemed to invigorate Mrs. Thornton; a faint, delicate color came back to her face.

“It may be a fancy of mine,” she said, “but I have an idea, even now, that if I could go abroad to some really warm, bright climate, I should get better.”

But Silvia, remembering *what* she had overheard, felt how very improbable it was that she would ever go.

The park was full; there was the usual string of carriages, with beautiful women smiling gracefully—of horses, with their fair riders—of lookers-on—of pedestrians.

Once or twice Mrs. Thornton bowed in return to a wondering salutation; once or twice she stopped, and answered pitying questions about her health. Every one told her how ill she looked, and that it was hardly fitting for her to be out.

She did, indeed, present a contrast to the happy, brilliant women, whose fair faces were flushed with fresh air and exercise.

“I am almost glad,” she said at last to Sylvia, “that my husband is *not* here—he would not be pleased——” but she never finished the sentence.

At that very moment she caught sight of him, sitting in an open carriage by Madame la Baronne’s side ; and madame was looking more beautiful than ever, under the shelter of a pink silk parasol. She saw him, but did not speak.

His eyes met hers, and a black, angry scowl passed over his face.

She did not know that Silvia had noticed the whole scene, but she had.

Suddenly Mrs. Thornton said :

“Let us go home ; I am tired. I wish I had not come. Let us go.”

At that very moment the open carriage dashed by, madame’s beautiful, brilliant face smiling and flushing while Mr. Thornton spoke to her.

The poor wife sank back, white, breathless, ghastly.

He had passed her without the least sign of recognition.

“Let us hasten home,” she said, faintly.

Silvia preserved a discreet silence ; she did not tell the unhappy lady what she had seen. She sat by her wondering how long it would be before the last act in that sad tragedy would be played out.

How long—she was almost alarmed at the ghastly change in that pale face.

“I shall never go out again, Silvia,” said Mrs. Thornton,

as the carriage drew up before the door of the stately, desolate mansion she called home. "The sun will be shining next year, and the wind whispering low; the flowers will all be blooming, and the happy, smiling women we saw to-day will be smiling still, but I shall be dead! Something tells me that I shall be dead! I suppose in another world I shall know what this short life was given to me for!"

One more incident, and then every suspicion that the unhappy wife had ever imagined seemed to be proved. She was taken very ill one day at noon, so ill that it seemed to her she was lying in the very shadow of death. She sent Silvia to ask her husband if he would remain at home, for she felt sure she was dying.

It was with some little anxiety that Silvia offered her petition.

"I should really be glad, for Mrs. Thornton seems so ill I am almost afraid to be left alone with her."

"What use could I be?" he said brusquely. "I am not a sick-nurse. How in the world do you suppose I could spend a whole evening in a sick-room? I could not make the sacrifice if I tried."

And the next morning, from some caller, she heard that he had spent the evening in Madame la Baronne's box at the opera.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FORTUNE-HUNTER'S VICTIM.

A MONTH later and Mrs. Thornton lay dying. The struggle was over and ended; she had laid herself down contented to die—thankful to leave a life wherein she found so little happiness—but true to her husband to the last. Silvia was sitting with her one morning, when she turned to her suddenly:

“I have such a great longing on me, Silvia,” she said. “I would give anything to see my guardian again, now that I am surely dying. I do not think he would refuse to come.”

“Shall I go and ask him?” whispers the sweet voice; and the delicate, lovely face bends pityingly over her.

“If you will. He was always kind to me, and I should like to see him once more. Tell him I am dying, Silvia—he will not refuse. I should like to see him, and hear him speak once more.”

“I will take a cab,” said Silvia, “and he will perhaps return with me.”

She went to the address given, and was fortunate to find Mr. Latham at home. He was in his study, and briefly enough she explained her errand. He looked very grave, and very sad.

“Poor Clara—poor, hapless, foolish child!” he said;

“so she is dying—well, she has lived longer than I for one thought she would. She is the victim of a fortune-hunter, Mrs. Rymer—that is your name, I believe—the victim of a fortune-hunter, the neediest and greediest of his class.”

“You will come and see her, sir,” said Silvia, gently. “She says you were always kind to her, and she clings to you. You will surely come.”

“I will come on one condition,” he said; “that I have not to meet that heartless rogue. I could not control myself if I did. I must raise my right hand to punish him.”

“You will not meet him,” she replied. “Mr. Thornton is gone with a party of friends to Wimbledon.”

“Friends!” interrupted the old man, harshly; “you mean he is gone with that woman, of whom every one is talking—Madame von Faiteuil—he is gone with her, I suppose.”

“I know no more than I can tell you, sir. He said he was going to Wimbledon for a day’s pleasure, with a party of friends.”

“He is a model husband, to go out for a day’s pleasure while his wife is dying,” said the old man, savagely. “I wish there was law in England to punish him; he should not escape.”

But Silvia, although she indorsed every word he said, would not make matters worse.

“Mrs. Thornton never complains, sir,” she replied.

“Complain !” he cried ; “not she—I know that. She is one of the patient Griselda kind, born to be some man’s slave. The only pity is that she did not fall into the hands of a good man. She would not complain if he knocked her down and trampled the life out of her. He has killed her by inches, I suppose, as every one said he would.”

Silvia made no reply. The old man rose from his seat, and began to pace angrily up and down the room.

“You cannot tell,” he said, “you do not know the annoyance this affair has caused me. The uncle trusted the girl to me, trusted her fortune in my hands, and this is the end of it. I warned her, my wife warned her, but it was all in vain ; she took her life into her own hands, and this is the terrible failure that she has made of it.”

Silvia made no reply, from the simple fact that she was quite at a loss what to say ; every word was true. No one knew better than herself what came of it when a girl took her own life into her own hands.

“I thought,” she said, after a short pause, “that you would, perhaps, go back with me. I have kept the cab waiting.”

“Yes, I will go. But do you know what they are saying of this man all over London ?

“No,” she replied.

“They say that he spends all his time with Madame von Faiteuil ; they say that he has purposely been unkind to his

wife ; that he has neglected her, killed her by coldness and neglect, and that, as soon as she is dead, he will marry this beautiful demon. Is it true, do you think ? ”

“ I hope not—I trust not ; I cannot say.”

“ Poor, helpless child ; she was a sweet, docile girl, but her fortune was her ruin ; it tempted this handsome, needy rogue, and she was deluded into marrying him. She might have had such a happy, brilliant life ; she might have lived long and happily, but she threw her life away, and now she is dying, you say ? ”

“ Yes, she is dying,” said Silvia, gently. “ You must not add to her unhappiness one word of reproach.”

“ I will not,” he replied.

A few minutes later they were driving through the busy streets. She began to understand then how the guardian had loved his unfortunate ward. He told her a hundred stories of Clara’s goodness, her simplicity, her generosity, always winding up with the same paradox—that her fortune had been her ruin.

At last they reached Cleve House.

“ Do you know,” said Mr. Latham, nervously, “ I feel strangely timid. I—see, my hands positively tremble.”

Silvia led him into the drawing-room, and poured out some wine.

“ I want it,” he said, “ but I could not touch it ; it would either poison me or choke me. No, I will not drink it. We will go to my ward, if you please.”

"Is he come?" asked the weak voice, as Silvia entered the room.

"Yes, Mr. Latham is here;" and as she spoke he came in. The poor lady held out her hands to him, with a breathless sob.

"I am so glad you have come," she said; "how good it is of you."

"You did not think that I should refuse, Clara?" he asked.

"I knew that I did not deserve it," she whispered; "but I am so glad. I felt that I could not die in peace until I had seen you, and thanked you once more for all your kindness to me in those far-off happy days."

He was deeply touched. Silvia saw how his strong hand trembled and his lips quivered.

"It is so long since I have seen you," she said, "so long."

"Yes; I could not break my word—I could not visit here."

"But I felt sure that when you heard I was dying you would come."

"You must not be so sure of death," he said, trying to affect a cheerfulness he did not feel. "You may get better yet, Clara. While there is life there is always hope."

"Look at my face," she said; "what is it you see there?"

Death!—he knew it; it was imprinted on every feature, and yet the ruling passion was with her still.

“You must not think it strange that my—that Mr. Thornton is not with me,” she said. “He has gone out to-day; it is very dull here always.”

She would make excuses for him with her last breath, but here they were neither needed nor believed.

“My dear Clara,” said her guardian, “your husband is the only topic that I would rather *not* discuss with you.”

“But you see,” she said, in her faint, eager voice, “you see that he has not gambled, nor played, nor bet, since we have been married.”

“I grant that; I admit it—so much the better for your fortune; but, Clara, not another word, my dear, on this topic. Tell me, is there anything I can do for you?”

The tears fell from her eyes on his hands.

“There is one thing I wish to ask you: Mrs. Rymer—Silvia—my friend—has been very kind to me. I want you to tell me, can I leave her anything? You told me, when I was married, that all my fortune became my husband’s; but have I not the power to leave her as much as would make her comfortable?”

“No,” he said, gravely. “Owing to the rash manner in which you married, my poor child, you have not the power to will one single shilling of the thousands you once called your own.”

CHAPTER XXV.

A REJECTED APPEAL.

WHEN Mrs. Thornton heard Mr. Latham's words she burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

"I am so sorry!" she said. "Oh, Silvia, I am so sorry!"

"What is it you wanted to do?" asked Mr. Latham, kindly.

She raised her sad eyes to his face.

"I wanted to leave Mrs. Rymer something for life—she has been so kind to me."

But Silvia knelt by the dying woman's side.

"You must not trouble about me," she said. "I would not have you disturbed or unhappy to be made a queen for life."

"The worst of such a marriage as yours, my dear," said Mr. Latham, quietly, "is, that it does not only place the wife herself in the hands of an unprincipled man, but all her fortune. I consider that a great evil. Your husband has not done so, but he might have spent every shilling of yours, and have reduced you to beggary."

Still she wept, because to the best friend she had it was not possible to leave even the smallest assistance. Her tears touched her guardian's heart. He said to himself that her wish should be gratified, even at his own expense. He laid his hand on hers.

"Come, Clara," he said, "you must not despair. Tell me what you did want to leave Mrs. Rymer?"

"I wished to give her a thousand pounds," said the feeble voice; "that would bring her in sufficient to live upon."

“And would that make you very happy?” he asked.

“I should die with more content,” she replied; and in those words he saw the hopelessness of her sorrow.

“I think I know how it can be managed. You always trusted me in money affairs, and always may. I will attend to it for you.”

She had always placed such implicit confidence in him, she knew him to be so full of resource, so clever, that she never doubted but that he had the power to get a thousand pounds of hers, if she needed it.

“You will not let Gustave know what it is for,” she said. “He would not understand—he does not know how kind Mrs. Rymer has been to me.”

“He shall know nothing at all about it,” was the grave reply. “Leave all that to me, and trust me, it shall be done. A thousand pounds, a bequest from you, shall be settled on Mrs. Rymer. You may be just as happy over it as though it were already done.”

If she had known it was to come out of his pocket she would have been even more grateful; but he was not one to speak of a kindness.

“I suppose,” said Mrs. Thornton, faintly, “that your wife would not come to see me, no matter how much I prayed her to do so?”

A shadow came over his grave face.

“I think not, my dear; she was greatly disappointed in you, you know.”

“Will you tell her from me, *not* that I repent my marriage—a thousand times over, not that—but how sorry I am for disappointing her? Will you remember?”

He promised; and then as he sat there he saw a terrible change coming over her face. He rose hastily.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you, my poor child?" he said, bending over her.

"No," she whispered. "Thank you for coming. It is growing dark, and it seems to me that I can hear the sound of a river rushing so quickly along. Let me hold your hand once more. Good-by—and, guardian, tell every one that my husband was kind to me, and that my marriage was really a happy one—you will not forget?"

Tears stood warm and bright in his eyes as he went away.

"Faithful to the very last!" he said. "Why are women so good and men so bad? She would rather have died any death than have said one unkind word of him, and the chances are that he never says a kind word to her."

Two hours later and Silvia knelt by the bedside, holding the wasted hand in hers.

"You tell me it is not night yet," said the faint voice; "not yet, and it is so dark? Oh, if the rush of the river would only stop! There is a bank afar off all covered with flowers, and I can hear singing—sweet, soft music. Silvia—Silvia! hold my hand fast; do not let me die without seeing my husband. I could not rest in my grave—I should have to come back and look at the face I love!"

"You shall see him," said Silvia, soothingly.

"I *must* see him. Oh! Silvia, no grave could hold me if I were to die without saying good-by to him. I have loved him so dearly. Do you know where he is? Could you send for him?"

Silvia made all inquiries, but no one knew where Mr. Thornton was. The only one who could give any information was his valet, who said that his master was going out to dinner in the evening, and had arranged to be home by six.

So Silvia returned to her.

“He will be here by six,” she said, gently; “it is after four now.”

“Shall I live until then? Yes, I shall—I am sure I shall. The strength of my own wish will keep me alive until six.”

She murmured the words to herself over and over again.

“Until six. Oh! Silvia, stand by my side, and count the minutes for me—tell me how they pass.”

Doctors had been there, and looked their last at her. A gray-haired minister, whose saintly face told of a saintly life, had knelt and prayed by her side. She had finished with the world, but it seemed as though her soul was still held there by the intense longing to see her husband. She had divided all her little treasures, but Silvia steadfastly refused to accept even one jewel. The only gift she accepted was a small ring set with pearls.

“Dark—so dark! And, oh! the rush of the river. Silvia! Silvia! hold my hands fast, lest I fall in. The music is coming nearer to me! There is a kind face smiling at me from among the flowers. And, oh! Silvia, there is another face, like the picture, crowned with thorns!”

A great light came over the dying face, and she lay still, as one whose thoughts could not be put into words.

Then the clock struck five, and the white lips murmured. Silvia knew that she was praying that she might see her husband again.

“Once more, my love!” she said, faintly—“once more let my eyes rest on you! Once more put your arms round me and whisper a loving word as you kiss my face! Oh, my love! my love! how shall I leave you?”

The ruling passion strong in death! She drew Silvia nearer to her, and whispered:

“If, after I am dead, people say he was not kind to me,

tell them it is not true ; bear testimony for me that my last words were a prayer and a blessing. Oh, my love ! my love ! ”

A deep silence fell over them, only broken when she started up, crying :

“ Oh, the river ! the river ! Keep me, I am falling in ! ”

Then the clock struck six. The sound reached her. Who shall say how she smiled ?

“ God is good to me,” she said. “ He has let me wait to see him. Set the door open, Silvia, and let them watch for him.”

But the minutes passed without bringing him—five, ten, fifteen.

“ He will not come,” thought Silvia, and her heart sank with a weight cold and heavy as death.

A few minutes more and she heard a cab drive quickly up to the door, and a slight confusion in the hall, followed by Mr. Thornton’s voice, saying in sharp, quick accents :

“ Make haste ! Quick ! I am late ! ”

A crimson flush passed over the white face. A light, wonderful to see, shone in the depth of those dim eyes.

“ Silvia, Silvia, bring him to me ! I shall see him once again ! ”

Without another word, Silvia quitted the room, and ran up stairs to Mr. Thornton’s dressing-room.

Let no one think what follows exaggerated—let no one think the picture overdrawn. She rapped hastily at the door.

“ I want to speak to you, Mr. Thornton. Pray make haste ! It is life or death ! ”

“ What is it ? ” he cried, impetuously. The next moment the door was opened, and he appeared, looking surprised when he saw her. “ Mrs. Rymer,” he said, “ what brings

you here? Pray do not interrupt me ; I have an engagement this evening, and I am late now. What is it?"

"I pray you, come!" said Silvia earnestly. "Mrs. Thornton is dying, and she cannot die until she has seen you."

He laughed aloud—not merely smiled, but laughed aloud.

"I have heard that story," said he, "any number of times for any number of years."

"But, indeed, it is true!" cried Silvia, clasping her hands in wild distress. She dare not think what would happen if he should persist in refusing. "Pray believe me, Mr. Thornton! I swear to you, your wife has not many minutes to live! She would have been dead ere now but for her intense desire to see you again."

"I will look in to-night when I come home," he said, impatiently. "You know yourself, Mrs. Thornton dies every time I go out to dinner. It is the old fable of the shepherd and the wolves. Please, do not hinder me. It is very painful for me to say to one so charming as yourself, 'Go!' but I am afraid I must. I ought to be at Aston House now."

He turned, as though the conversation had lasted long enough ; but Silvia caught his arm in an agony of entreaty.

"I pray you," she said, "for Heaven's sake, to come. She is dying, sir, as truly as I am speaking to you."

"Nothing of the kind," he interrupted. "I am not to be beguiled into a scene, Mrs. Rymer—be reasonable. I will see her to-night when I return."

"You will not," said Silvia, solemnly, "you will never see her again. I did not think that on the face of the earth there was a man so cold—so callous—so wicked—as to refuse seeing his dying wife."

"She is not dying," he said. "I tell you it is all an old woman's fable."

"May Heaven pardon you!" said the girl, sadly. "See, Mr. Thornton, I would kneel at your feet to appeal to you. For Heaven's dear sake—as you wish to die in peace yourself—if only for one moment—come."

"Oh! Mrs. Rymer, Mrs. Rymer, to think you can be so foolish!"

Silvia's face flushed crimson.

"I warn you," she said, "not to refuse. Your wife says she cannot, she shall not, rest in her grave, unless she sees you. For your own sake—come!"

He laughed again; but this time she detected something of uneasiness in his laughter."

"I make one more appeal to you," she cried, in an agony of distress—"if only for one minute—for Heaven's sake—come! Think how she has loved you—grant her this one prayer."

He gently removed her hand from the lock of the door.

"That is quite enough," he said; "more than enough. I will leave Aston House earlier than I intended to—but go I must."

He closed the door, and she turned away with a despairing cry, that might have convinced him; but it did not.

"What shall I say to her? What can I tell her?" she said. "I would rather die than go back and tell her he will not come. Women love men—and this is what they get for their love!"

She heard his voice calling his valet—hurrying—scolding—and she thought of the death-bed so near. Was it any wonder that a wild cry went from her heart, as she asked of Heaven why it was?

CHAPTER XXVI.

DESPAIR AND DEATH.

PROFOUND silence reigned in the room as she re-entered it. The nurse sat by the side of the bed. Silvia tried to move so gently that the dying woman should not hear her ; but senses quickened by love are not to be deceived.

“Silvia ! Silvia ! where is he ? is he coming ? ”

“He will be here, dear, soon,” she replied.

Never while she lived did she forget the look on that face, the despair that even death could not change.

“Did you tell him that I was dying ? ” she asked, in a terrible voice.

“He knows, dear, and he is coming.”

“You told him, and he is not here. Oh ! Silvia—my love, my love ! ”

“He will come, indeed,” said Silvia, bending over her ; “have patience one minute.”

But just as she said the words, she heard the hurried footsteps of the cruel husband going down stairs.

“Gustave ! ” cried his wife, and the sound of her voice was so terrible that Silvia shrank—“Gustave——”

He laughed as he heard it.

“That doesn’t seem much like dying,” he said to himself. “I knew it was all a farce.”

They heard the door close, and the hasty departure of the carriage.

Silvia dare not look at her.

“Gustave ! ” cried the dying voice again. “Oh ! my love, my love ! ”

The words seemed to lie on her lips. She turned her face to the wall with a faint sigh.

“Good-by, Silvia,” she said, after a short pause, and they did not hear her voice again, nor did they know when she died.

Half-an-hour afterward Silvia went to her, hoping to cheer her, and found her dead.

Yet it was no surprise; they had known her hours were numbered; the nurse had said that she could not live until sunset.

The doctor had foretold that a few hours at the most must end her life.

No one had doubted of her immediate death but the husband who laughed at her dying appeal.

It was a melancholy end. She might have been so happy in the love of a good man. She was young, fair, rich; she had every prospect once of a long and happy life, and all was destroyed through her own weakness in marrying a man of whom every one spoke ill, against whom her best friends warned her—a man who had never loved her, whose neglect and unkindness had most surely broken her heart, who had laughed at her dying appeal, and sent her to death with terrible despair as her portion.

Silvia waited for him.

She had not expected him any earlier than usual; but, to her surprise, it was not much after midnight when he came.

He entered the house with a careless smile, taking no heed of the grave face of the servant who opened the door.

Then Silvia stepped forward to meet him.

“Ah! Mrs. Rymer, I have kept my word, you see. Now, I will go and see Mrs. Thornton; she ought to think herself flattered. I have left the most brilliant party in London for

her ; I was late, though, thanks to you, and I am one of those who think it bad taste to be too late for dinner."

Silvia made no reply.

She led the way to Mrs. Thornton's room ; it was in darkness, save for the tapers that burned round the dead.

For the first time in his life, he entered the room and no tender voice greeted him ; no sweet, worn face flushed at the sound of his footsteps. She who had loved him so well lay there, calm and silent, wrapped in the dignified majesty of death.

He started back in undisguised horror.

"What is this ?" he cried. "My God ! what is this ?"

Silvia took his hand, and led him close to his dead wife's side.

"That is your work !" she said ; "look well at it. Some men drop poison in the food that is given to their wives ; sometimes a man loses his patience, and stabs a woman. You have done neither—you have deliberately, willfully broken her heart, and you know it ; you have done it purposely. You married her without love, and every hour of her married life has been full of untold pain to her. The last cry of her broken heart, her last appeal to you, you have disregarded—you would not listen to it. Now, look, look at that face ! You know, perhaps, that death should be calm, serene, happy, with a light not all of this world on the quiet brow, and a smile on the lips. Look at that face ! look at its heart-break, its anguish, its despair ! You sent her to death with despair in her heart !"

He stood in perfect silence, great drops on his brow, and a livid hue on his face.

"Upon my soul," he said, "I did not believe it ; I did not

think she was dying—I have heard so many false alarms ! If I had thought it, I would not have gone out.”

“Yet I told you,” she said. “You did not care to believe it—you did not wish to believe it. I do not think you would have given up one hour’s pleasure to have saved her life.”

Silvia was not quite free from superstition.

“I must tell you,” she said, “that your wife’s last words were that no grave could hold her, that *she could never rest until she had looked upon your face again*, and I warn you that *she will see you !*”

“Do not say such things—you might see that I am frightened to death as it is.”

And the man who had been so expert a tyrant suddenly became the most timorous of cowards.

“I—I am frightened,” he said. “Do let me come out of this gloomy place ; and I cannot sleep alone. Where is Adolphe ? he must sleep in my room ; and let me have plenty of lights, please. Poor Clara ! Upon my word I am sorry for her—very sorry.”

After those words he quitted the room.

Silvia heard him asking for brandy, ordering more lights, talking loudly to drown his fears ; and her heart rebelled against the coward, who had not been afraid to break his wife’s heart, but who *was* afraid of her now that she was dead.

He never entered her room again.

All the preparations for her funeral were left to Silvia.

He grumbled frightfully at the idea that he was obliged to attend that.

“Horrible work ! dull—tedious enough to give a man the horrors—it would make him ill for weeks. A funeral, when the very sight of the trappings of death unnerved him.”

“If I could but make some excuse for not going,” he said to Silvia, on the morning of the funeral.

She looked at him with contempt.

His face was white, his lips blue—he presented the most abject picture of terror.

“I think it is of very little consequence whether you go or not,” she said. “You paid no respect to the poor lady during her life, it seems a mere farce for you to attempt it now she is dead.”

“I must go, or the world will never stop talking; and, Mrs. Rymer, I owe you no ill-will, but I do wish you had been miles away before you had talked all that nonsense about my wife, you know—coming back to look at me; of course, it is all nonsense, she cannot do any such thing; but it has frightened me. All night long I am expecting her to stand by my bedside; when a door opens, I expect to see her enter. I do not believe it; but did ever you hear of such a case happening?”

“I cannot tell—I have heard of strange things; but whether they are true or not, I believe honestly, from the very depth of my heart, that your wife *will* come to take her last look at you.”

She was startled by his cry of terror.

“I shall die if she does; I will never be left alone again, come what may.”

And before he went to the funeral, Silvia saw that he drank a tumbler of brandy. Yet even that gave him neither courage nor nerve.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CHILD WITHOUT A NAME.

THE funeral was over, the hapless lady was laid to rest, the blinds were drawn up in the darkened house, the gloom was all ended, the servants were pleased with their new mourning, and as a death in the family always necessitates a little extra good living, the cook was engaged in the preparation of a *recherché* little repast, to be served up in the servants' hall when the funeral baked meats should be done away with.

In all the world, who mourned for her except the guardian whose advice she had despised, and the young girl who had nursed her so tenderly and so skillfully?

Silvia had resolved that she would not remain in the house one hour after the funeral was over.

There had been no reading of a will, simply because the poor lady had made none—she had nothing to will. Her fortune had passed into her husband's hands at her marriage.

After the funeral, Mr. Thornton seemed to recover his scattered senses. He had handsomely paid the nurse who had attended upon his wife, and she, softened by the handsome present, declared he was a strange kind of gentleman, but that he *was* a gentleman after all.

The doctors were presented with heavy fees, which quite removed all doubt as to Mr. Thornton being a good husband. Then he sent for Mrs. Rymer, but she would not accept one shilling more than her due.

He said something about filling up a check; she told him that she should take nothing but the money owing to her.

“At least,” he said, “you will let me offer you your choice from my poor wife’s jewelry?”

“No,” she said; “I have this ring which Mrs. Thornton gave to me before she died; I need nothing else to remind me of her.”

“You are determined to keep your ill opinion of me?” he said.

“I shall never think differently of you, Mr. Thornton,” she replied, simply; “I would rather not discuss anything of the past with you.”

Just as she was leaving the house a note from Mr. Latham was put into her hands; she opened it and found it was from Mrs. Latham, asking her to call upon them.

“I should like to hear all about the poor child’s death,” she wrote. “Pray come to me as soon as you can, and, for your kindness to her, look upon me as your friend for life. I have heard of an engagement that may probably suit you. Lady Ianthe Hutton, the only daughter of the Earl of Leeson, wants a companion, and from what I hear of you, you will, I imagine, be very suitable for the office.”

The girl’s heart filled with gratitude. After all her troubles, her despondency, her despair, how good Heaven had been to her. Home and friends did not seem to fail her all through, and she had been thrown so young and so helpless, so lonely, on the wide, wide world.

She went at once to Mrs. Latham’s, and gave the weeping lady the history of Clara’s last hours.

“I did love her,” said Mrs. Latham. “She was a sweet, docile, gentle girl; yet she never did well for one single hour after she met that wretched man. It was a miserable end for her, but, alas! an end only too common, when a girl despises good counsel and neglects good advice.”

Then she told Silvia that Lady Leeson would be pleased to see her on the morrow.

"I think you will be happy with Lady Ianthe," she said. "I have met her several times; she is very beautiful, and amiable, I should imagine."

"Why does she require a companion?" asked Silvia.

"I do not know. Lady Leeson told me that she should very much like to find some nice ladylike girl to be with her daughter. I did not ask her why. If you call there to-morrow, you will probably hear more."

She bade Silvia adieu very kindly.

"Remember," she said, "that for your kindness to that unhappy child, I am your friend for life."

As Silvia was leaving the house, a servant followed her to say that Mr. Latham wished to see her. She went into the library, where he sat surrounded by books and papers.

"You are forgetting the principal part of your business here," he said, with a smile. "What about your annuity?"

It certainly spoke well for her disinterestedness that she had not thought of it.

"It certainly made poor Clara happier in dying," he said, "to know that she had made some small provision for you, and her last wish shall be carried out."

She was too simple and inexperienced to ask him how. It seemed to her as it had done to Mrs. Thornton, that he could do anything he liked.

Mr. Latham dipped a pen in the massive inkstand.

"Now," he said, "you have but to sign your name on these two parchments, and you are mistress of a thousand pounds in the funds. You will find it useful to you some day."

How useful neither of them guessed in that hour. Then

after kindly words of commendation from him, she went away. The great longing of her heart was to see little Cyril. During Mrs. Thornton's long illness she had been unable to go away, and a great fear was upon her that he would have forgotten her—the baby forget her!

It seemed to Silvia as though no horse was ever so slow as this one which was taking her to Hampstead; she only wondered then that she had been able to remain away so long.

Another half-hour and she was seated in the little cottage, holding baby on her knees. Well, of course, there never was such another baby, so perfect, so beautiful, so clever; and he was like—oh! so like her false lover; so like him that every glance of the eyes, every turn of the graceful little head, was like a dagger in the girl's heart.

“Oh, baby—baby!” she cried, with passionate tears, “why are you so like him, and he was so cruel to me—so false!”

But baby knew nothing about it; his little fingers played with his mother's hair, his pretty red lips were raised to kiss her. What did baby understand about his mother's troubles and his father's desertion—what did baby know about her being thrown on the wide, wide world!

It was one of the prettiest pictures in the world; the young mother with her sheen of golden hair and her fair face, prattling, talking almost like a baby herself, burying her face in the bright, golden curls, telling him that Heaven had been so good to them, that come what would, there was no danger of starvation for them.

“Baby was to go to school, baby should have new clothes, and baby should be a little prince.”

All of which baby devoutly believed, crowing with delight, and doing his best to entangle every curl on his mother's head.

“Mamma and baby will always be alone,” she said, “alone in the world ; but they will love each other so dearly, so dearly.”

Yet, in the midst of her happiness at seeing him, she wept bitter tears when she remembered she could give him love, care, and affection, but she could never while he lived give him a name.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LADY IANTHE'S CHOICE.

ANOTHER week, and Mrs. Rymer found herself stalled as companion to the Lady Ianthe Hutton ; although what that exalted young lady wanted with a companion puzzled her greatly.

The Countess Leeson, who engaged her, had not been very explicit on the subject. After they had discussed it for some time during their first interview, Lady Leeson had said, very frankly :

“I want a companion for my daughter, on the principle that ‘constant dropping wears away stone.’”

“Am I to be the stone ?” asked Silvia, with a smile.

“No,” replied my lady. “To carry out the simile properly, Lady Ianthe would be the stone, and you the dropping water. You will understand better when you have been with us some little time. I cannot give my confidence to a stranger, but I like your face, and trust you ; if you justify my liking, I will soon tell you why my daughter, in my opinion, requires a companion.”

Then Mrs. Rymer asked to see the Lady Ianthe.

“It might be possible that Lady Ianthe would not like me ; it would be much better that she should see me.”

The countess laughed. She gave Silvia the idea of a French woman more than an English one. She was handsome, with a stately kind of beauty ; gracious, with a kind of dignified condescension that did not sit ill upon her ; yet one could tell that beneath that amiable, half-yielding, half-caressing manner, there was a will of iron ; it was the iron hand sheathed with the velvet glove. Her eyes were fine—blue, bright, and winsome, but in their depths was something no one understood properly—firmness that was more masculine than feminine ; she was the kind of woman who would have made her way over red-hot plowshares, but she would have gone direct.

“The countess is very firm,” her friends, servants, and dependents said of her ; but the depth of that firmness no one properly understood save those who suffered from it.

“In compliance with Mrs. Rymer’s request, she rang the bell and asked for the Lady Ianthe. Silvia could not help feeling some slight curiosity as to what the young lady would be like.

The door opened a few minutes afterwards, and she entered the room. She did not resemble the countess. Lady Leeson’s hair was dark brown, her daughter’s burnished gold ; Lady Leeson had a brightly-colored face, her daughter’s was clear, delicate, pale as a lily-leaf. The most striking part of her beauty was, that while her hair was of burnished gold, and her face fairer than the fairest flower, her eyes were dark—in hue resembling a purple heart’s-ease—with a golden light shining through them ; her brows straight, clear, and dark. Had her eyes been blue or gray, she would still have been a beautiful girl ; but, with this striking peculiarity, she was lovely as a vision. She wore a plain white morning dress, fastened with a golden pin ; no other ornaments, no flowers.

no jewels, except that her hands were covered with costly shining rings.

She looked up with some little curiosity as she entered the room, and round Lady Leeson's lips there hovered the faintest smile.

"You wished to see me, mamma," she said, in a low, sweet voice.

"I wish to introduce Mrs. Rymer to you," said the countess.

"Mrs. Rymer!" repeated the low voice, in calm surprise.

"The lady who is kind enough to consent to be your companion," said Lady Leeson.

There was both contempt and surprise in the beautiful face.

"You have persevered in your resolution, mamma. I did not know it."

Then she looked at Silvia, and her face relaxed as she did so.

"You will not prove to be a very formidable companion," she said, with a smile.

"I will try to please you in every possible way," was the gentle reply.

And then, all the details being arranged, it was settled that she should come to them on that day week.

"I should be glad," she said to Lady Leeson, "if you would give me some idea of what duties I shall have to perform. Lady Ianthe has a maid. What shall I be required to do for her?"

"Read to her, sing to her, talk to her. You will find quite enough to do when you have been with us a short time."

Yet the young girl left the house in a state of bewilderment. She could not possibly understand what Lady Ianthe wanted with a companion. She spent a week at Hampstead very

happily, the little Cyril growing more beautiful to her loving eyes every day, yet so fatally like him—the false, cruel, treacherous lover, who had stolen her heart away. Then she went back to Dale House.

Her bewilderment lasted for a few days ; then she began to understand why she was engaged. She had thought deeply over the matter.

“I am so young,” she said—“hardly twenty yet—and I seem to have seen so much of life. Among all those I have known, I have not met one whose life was commonplace ; whatever the surface might be like—plain, unvarnished, homely—underneath there has been the elements of a grand tragedy. Who that looked at Cleve House would have thought a broken-hearted woman lay dying there? Who that looked at Lake Cottage would have thought a blighted, miserable life had been almost brought to a close there? I shall never believe in the commonplace again. Lady Ianthe is an only daughter, beautiful, admired, but who knows what tragedy underlies the seeming quiet of that peaceful life?”

On the first day of her arrival she went into Lady Ianthe's dressing-room. She was preparing for a ball ; a superb dress lay ready, jewels were shining in their cases ; the maid, Honor Preston, stood anxiously awaiting her young mistress's decision.

A servant had just brought two beautiful bouquets into the room, the first composed of the most costly exotics, with Lord Monford's compliments—the other of white lilies, sent by Mr. Clifford Raymond.

Mrs. Rymer, whose only occupation just then was arranging the white, soft plumage of a costly fan, looked up and watched her. She did not pay the least heed when Lord Monford's superb bouquet was taken in. She never even raised her eyes, or gave the least sign of having heard the name.

But it was far otherwise when Mr. Raymond's name was mentioned. She held out her hands for the flowers, a lovely smile playing round her lips, a tender light in her eyes, as though she were gazing upon something she loved.

She laid the sweet, white lilies on the table near her, and Silvia noted how her eyes lingered on them.

"Which bouquet will you carry, my lady?" asked the maid, in a calm, business-like voice.

"The white one," replied Lady Ianthe, and the very tone of her voice was to Silvia like a caress.

"This is far more beautiful," said Honor; "these little pink bells are superb. See, my lady."

But Lady Ianthe made no reply; the business of the toilet went on, and in a short time was completed, the young girl herself looking beautiful as a vision.

"Where is my fan?" she asked, and Silvia placed it in her hands, thinking that she spoke hurriedly. The maid stood ready with a crimson opera cloak.

"Quick!" said my lady, imperiously; but before she had finished the word, in sailed the countess, looking superb in satin and diamonds.

"You are dressed, Ianthe; that is well. We shall not be late."

The calm, critical eyes looked at the lovely young figure from head to foot with an expression of keen approval.

"Your dress is in excellent taste, but"—her eyes falling on the white lilies—"what paltry flowers have you there?"

The beautiful face flushed deepest crimson. She held her lilies in her hand.

"No one could call such flowers as these paltry, mamma; they are exquisite."

"They are very well for lilies; but when I heard Lord

Monford had sent a bouquet, I expected something very different."

Lady Ianthe made no reply ; she was evidently *not* intending to tell the real state of the case, when the countess, looking round, saw the rival bouquet lying all unheeded on a chair.

"What superb flowers," she said. "Pray, who sent these?" Then Lady Ianthe raised her eyes to her mother's face.

"Lord Monford sent them," she replied.

"And these?" asked the countess, pointing to the lilies.

Lady Ianthe's face flushed.

"These," she replied, clasping the lilies more tightly ; "these came from Mr. Raymond."

"Put them away, Ianthe ; they are really too common. They quite destroy the effect of your dress."

"I prefer them to the others," was the reply, and then the two ladies looked at each other.

"Lady Ianthe," said the countess, "you please yourself, of course ; but if you persist in carrying those lilies, I refuse to take you to the ball."

The young girl turned away.

"I shall be pleased to stay at home, mamma," she said, quietly, and the countess, without another word, swept from the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HOUSE WITH A MYSTERY.

CALMLY, as she had spoken, Lady Ianthe removed her jewels. The maid, standing by, with a puzzled, perplexed face, looked as though she hardly understood.

"Bring me a wrapper," said Lady Ianthe, calmly, "and put this dress away."

When Honor had gone to do her bidding, Lady Ianthe turned to her companion.

"Mrs. Rymer," she said, pointing to the obnoxious bouquet, "will you oblige me by taking those flowers down stairs and putting them into the fire?"

"Burn them!" repeated Silvia. "Oh! Lady Ianthe, I could not; it seems to me they are living, and would cry out when the flames touched them."

"You are fanciful. If they did cry out I know what they would say."

"What would it be?" asked Silvia.

"They would ask pardon for coming where they were not wanted. Seriously, Mrs. Rymer, do remove them; spare their lives if you do not wish to kill them; take them to your own room; you seem fond of flowers."

"I love them dearly," she replied, thinking of the roses and lilies at Brae, and how lovingly she had tended them. Lady Ianthe did not seem inclined to continue the conversation. Silvia took up the flowers and quitted the room, not, however, before she had seen the beautiful face bent over the lilies, and the lovely lips kissing them with endearing words.

Mother and daughter were equally well-bred; they met on the morning after the little encounter amicably as usual. Lady Leeson talked of the ball; Lady Ianthe asked who was there.

"You must look to your laurels, Ianthe," said her mother, smilingly; "last year you were called 'La Reine Blonde,' this year I think Cecile Everington eclipses you."

"Does she? I did not find the *rôle* of queen very interesting; it may please her better."

“ I think it will ; she is a very charming girl. The Duke Of Griston, Lord Monford, and many of the best men in the room seemed quite enchanted with her. I felt half offended. Lady Reny told me *you* were not missed.”

If the proud mother were trying to pique the proud daughter into anything like jealousy she did not succeed ; the beautiful face was calm and unmoved as possible. They talked on, Lady Leeson telling anecdotes, Lady Ianthe listening and commenting, when the earl entered the room, and Silvia saw him for the first time. He started at the sight of the delicate, lovely face and deep mourning dress ; then he spoke very kindly to Mrs. Rymer.

“ Discussing the ball ! ” he said carelessly. “ How was it you did not go, Ianthe ? I understood you were to accompany your mother.”

“ I displeased mamma,” was the candid reply, “ and she told me I had better remain at home.”

“ What did you do ? ” asked the earl, with a smile that was half a frown.

“ I refused to take the bouquet Lord Monford sent me, and I wanted the one that Mr. Raymond brought. Mamma would not let me have it, so I stayed at home.”

The Earl Leeson looked as though it would have been a great relief to him if he could have whistled aloud ; as it was, he contented himself by saying :

“ If you are wise, Ianthe, you will follow your mother’s wishes.”

“ But,” she replied, raising her eyes to his with a charming smile, “ I am not wise, papa, and, in that sense, never shall be.”

Visitors came, and Mrs. Rymer left the room, wondering a little at what she had heard. Later on that day the countess

sent for her. She closed the door of her dressing-room, and seemed to have a great desire for a private and confidential conversation.

"Mrs. Rymer," she said, gently; "I want you to tell me what my daughter did yesterday—last evening rather—with those flowers."

Silvia half-hesitated.

"Mind," she continued, "if I am asking you these questions, it is not that I want you to be a spy upon my daughter. It is in her true interest and as her best friend that I ask you the question. Of course, you can please yourself whether you answer me or not," she concluded, haughtily.

Silvia thought for a few minutes.

"Of course," she said to herself, "a girl's mother must be her best friend. Oh, if I had but trusted mine, how different all my life would have been!"

"Have you decided upon answering me?" asked Lady Leeson, proudly.

Silvia looked up at her.

"Yes," she replied; "I was wrong to hesitate. Naturally, you must be the Lady Ianthe's truest friend."

The handsome face cleared; Lady Leeson looked pleased.

"You speak sensibly, Mrs. Rymer. I trust in you to find a sensible friend and ally."

"Lady Ianthe asked me to destroy the flowers sent to her by Lord Monford. The others she has most carefully preserved in her room."

Lady Leeson looked terribly angry.

"How am I to bring such a girl to reason?" she said to herself. Then aloud she continued:

"I thank you, Mrs. Rymer. I begin to understand that

you are to be trusted. I shall soon tell you how constant dropping is to wear away stone."

Lady Leeson was very diplomatic ; she did not allude to the matter again ; she was most cordial and friendly with her beautiful daughter, yet Mrs. Rymer noticed that her conversation chiefly consisted of remarks about those fortunate girls who had married well, and pity for those who had done badly.

There was a mystery in this gorgeous mansion ; there was a tragedy in this sumptuous home, where one would have thought racking care could not come.

One day, Silvia, having rapped at the door of Lady Ianthe's room, and hearing no answer, naturally concluded no one was there. She opened the door and went in, when suddenly Lady Ianthe sprang from her seat at the writing-table and cried aloud. Her face in that one moment turned ghastly white ; she took up the paper she had been writing and tore it into shreds. Then the mist of fear seemed to clear from before her eyes.

"How you frightened me, Mrs. Rymer," she said ; "how cruelly you frightened me."

"Did you not hear me at the door?" asked Silvia.

"No, I did not ; I thought it was mamma, and I have destroyed my letter. I need not have done that. Do not startle me so again ; my heart beats as though it would break."

Silvia saw that she trembled so violently she could hardly stand.

"One moral is, never to enter a room without sufficient warning," she said, laughingly ; "another is, Lady Ianthe, never write a letter that you are so terribly afraid of being seen."

She said the words gently, not knowing how the earl's daughter would brook reproof from the humble companion.

Lady Ianthe sighed deeply.

"You are right," she said; "but when one is drawn into a web, one must get out of it."

Another day—it was warm, sultry, and oppressive—Lady Ianthe had gone into the dressing-room, and asked Mrs. Rymer, of whom she was growing very fond, to go and read with her.

The heat was very great, and she unfastened the high, white bodice, and Silvia saw, while bending over her, round her neck a gold chain of peculiar workmanship. Silvia touched it.

"How pretty this is, Lady Ianthe," she said. "It is Venetian, is it not?"

She was astonished to see the beautiful face flush, and the glorious eyes grow tender and dim.

"It is Venetian," she replied; "but I did not know my chain could be seen. I must alter that."

"It is pretty enough to be seen and admired," said Silvia.

Lady Ianthe laughed. She took it in her slender white fingers and kissed it.

"I must hide it," she said. "Oh, if any one knew what my pretty chain held, earthquakes would be nothing to it."

And Silvia, looking at it, saw at the end a small silver bag. What could it hold that earthquakes should be nothing to it?

After that day she noticed how often Lady Ianthe, in speaking, in thinking, in reading, would touch the chain with her fingers, and when she did touch it, what a happy smile played round her lips!

What secret had this proud daughter of this proud earl? What mystery was enfolded in this life, outwardly so calm and tranquil? What had gone wrong with her?

It was with no slight feeling of satisfaction that she noticed how much Lady Ianthe was beginning not only to like, but to trust her. She came to her one morning as Silvia was dressed, ready to go out on some little commission for Lady Leeson.

"Will you do me a favor?" she said; "will you post this letter for me?"

"I saw the post-bag only a minute ago on the hall table," replied Silvia, really believing Lady Ianthe did not know it was there.

"But that will not do; I want this posting unknown to any one."

Mrs. Rymer looked distressed.

"Do not ask me, Lady Ianthe," she said; "I would do anything for you, but this looks like treason to Lady Leeson. Pray do not ask me."

For the first time Lady Ianthe bent her proud bright head, and kissed Silvia.

"You are true," she said; "true of heart, and I shall trust you."

CHAPTER XXX.

A RUINED MAN.

MRS. RYMER had been nearly six weeks at Dale House, without being any nearer to solving the mystery than she was at first. Then Lady Leeson sent for her one day, and she saw the time had come when she was to know why she had been engaged as companion to Lady Ianthe.

The countess looked into her face with a smile as she entered.

"I asked you to come to my dressing-room," she said,

“because I want to speak to you privately and confidentially. I want to trust you. I am a good reader of character, and I have read yours. You have a secret in your life—that much I can tell. But I have no wish to know it. I trust you implicitly. Of course you can ruin us. If you betray my secret you will ruin us; but I would trust you even more than I do now did occasion require it.”

“You do me justice,” said Mrs. Rymer, with simple candor. “If I have no other good quality, at least I have that—I am quite trustworthy.”

“Now sit down,” said the countess. “We shall not be interrupted, Mrs. Rymer. That which I am going to tell you you must never repeat. I only ask your word.”

“That I pledge you,” she replied. “Nothing shall induce me to reveal one word of what your ladyship may say to me.”

The countess gave a great sigh. It was as though a mask had suddenly fallen from her face—a mask, the falling of which left her older and careworn, with lines on her brow, and a piteous quivering on her proud lips. It seemed to her such a relief that she was to tell the truth, even though it was to this humble companion.

“Mrs. Rymer,” she said, “my husband, the Earl of Leeson, one of the proudest peers in England, is a *ruined man*.”

Her voice seemed to die away on her lips as she said the words. Silvia looked up in utter wonder. The master of this magnificent house, this superb mansion, a ruined man! It was not possible.

“How it has happened,” said Lady Leeson, “does not matter. My lord was imprudent, *not* wicked—only weak and imprudent. His affairs would right themselves in the course of time, but that there is a heavy mortgage upon his property.

Do you understand enough of business to know what a mortgage is ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Silvia ; “ I understand it quite well.”

Lady Leeson continued—“ There is a mortgage of eighty thousand pounds on the Leesdale estates, and of twenty thousand on this mansion, plate, etc. The interest alone is enormous, and it takes a large income, but that is not the worst of it. If that money *never* had to be paid, we might do ; but if the mortgage should be suddenly called in we are ruined beyond all redemption. Do you see ? ”

“ Yes,” she replied, gravely ; “ I understand.”

“ This mortgage money was lent—through our lawyers, of course—by Lord Monford. He is very wealthy—one of the richest men in England, I should imagine—and I fancy that he loves money.

“ When we borrowed this my husband did not know who advanced it. It was money that Lord Monford’s solicitor had to put out at interest ; and they thought, I suppose, that a mortgage on Leesdale was as secure as anything well could be.”

She paused for a few minutes, then went on in a dry, hard voice :

“ It was hard for us, very hard ; but there seemed no help for it. I must tell you also, that it was agreed this money should not be called in without a year’s notice. Six months ago this notice came, and then Lord Leeson knew himself to be a ruined man ;—where and how was he to get a hundred thousand pounds ? . But Lord Monford’s advisers had seen a better way of investing the money—one that would bring in a higher rate of interest ; so we decided that the blow *must* fall, nothing could avert it. What the decision cost us, who shall ever know ?

“My lord said it was useless for the world to know before there was any need, so that we should come up to London and enjoy our last season.

“I must tell you that at Leesdale Park we have some neighbors called Raymond. They live on a pretty little estate called Pentons. They are good, worthy country people, not remarkable in any way—neither very aristocratic, very rich, nor very clever; but they have a son called Clifford, and this Clifford, I must say, is handsome and accomplished.

“Being neighbors, we have, of course, seen a great deal of the Raymonds. Clifford and my daughter Lady Ianthe were very great friends, little lovers, and all that kind of thing—I, of course, looking upon it as childish folly that would be forgotten when they grew up.

“When we came to London, our hearts full of distress and trouble that was carefully hidden from the world, my husband told me to cheer up. ‘Ianthe is so beautiful,’ he said, ‘so greatly admired, she may marry well, and then help may come for us.’ He was always most sanguine over her beauty, and the good fortune it might bring us.

“That which we thought in our blindness the most fortunate thing upon earth happened. Lord Monford saw Lady Ianthe, and at once fell deeply in love with her. When he came to lay his proposals before Lord Leeson, I saw tears of gratitude in my husband’s eyes.

“‘We are saved,’ he whispered to me; ‘Monford loves Ianthe, and wants to marry her before the season is over.’

“I, too, was thankful, Mrs. Rymer. You can never understand what a reprieve it was. That night, for the first time for many months, I slept soundly, without the fear of disgrace and shame.

“On the day following, Lord Leeson sent for Lady Ianthe,

and told her. You must understand that we had said nothing to her of our troubles, nor does she know them yet. It seems too hard to weigh down a young life so heavily.

“What was our grief, our dismay, when Ianthe, in the most positive manner, refused to hear anything of it.

“‘At least,’ said her father, ‘you will tell us why.’ And then she told us that she considered herself engaged to Clifford Raymond; that she loved him, and would not consent to break the engagement.

“I thought my husband would have gone distracted. He persuaded, implored—all in vain. She would not hear of it; still, by my advice, he refrained from telling her the state of our affairs.”

“Was it wise, do you think, Lady Leeson, to keep it from her?”

“I thought so then; I think so now. She is so proud that I believe knowing how we are situated would cause her at once to refuse Lord Monford, and would make her marry Raymond. I shall try every other influence. Then, if nothing avails, I will appeal to her to save us; but I wish to avoid that extremity if I can.”

“Does she like Lord Monford?” asked Mrs. Rymer, with a rush of warm pity through her heart.

“No,” was the calm reply; “I do not think she does; but that would not matter. In affairs of this kind we cannot afford to study likes and dislikes.”

“Yet it is for her whole life, Lady Leeson—her whole life.”

“She will not be the first who has made a similar marriage, yet has been happy in it,” replied Lady Leeson. “And now I will tell you, Mrs. Rymer, what I mean by constant dropping wearing away stone. I want you to talk to her continually

about the advantages of marrying Lord Monford, whenever you get an opportunity, and at all times ; then by degrees I think she will become accustomed to it. Do you understand ? ”

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CAPTURED SUITOR.

MRS. RYMER listened in grave silence ; she made no reply.

“ Well,” asked Lady Leeson, almost impatiently, “ what do you think ? ”

“ I will do my best ; but Lady Ianthe is proud, she will not brook much interference.”

“ I know that ; therefore it occurred to me that the constant presence of some one who, without any seeming interference or seeming interest, would continually advocate the cause of Lord Monford, would be about the most sensible course we could adopt ; that friend we have found in you.”

“ I have not yet seen either of the gentlemen,” said Mrs. Rymer.

“ You have an opportunity to-morrow. We receive a few friends in the evening, and they are sure, both of them, to be present. You can say what you think to Lady Ianthe about them, but mind you speak in the right interest, always on the right side, and then you will see the good effect of your influence.”

Mrs. Rymer still looked doubtful.

“ I will do my best,” she repeated ; “ but I am not very sanguine.”

“ I am,” repeated her ladyship. “ I know what follows when one constantly hears the same thing. You will keep

my counsel? Do not breathe one word of what I have said to you ; and remember—please, remember, that Lady Ianthe must know nothing of the real circumstances, until we have tried everything else, and everything else has failed.”

Silvia left Lady Leeson. There was a weight on her heart, a sense of coming evil and sorrow that she could not repress.

“It will not end well,” she said to herself. “No good ever came of forcing a girl’s inclination. If I were Lady Leeson, I should tell her the truth, and let her sacrifice herself, if she would.”

“You will come into the drawing-room this evening, Mrs. Rymer,” said Lady Leeson, with a gracious bow, on the morning following.

Lady Ianthe looked up, surprised at her mother’s unusual kindness, and Silvia felt her face grow crimson under the calm, clear gaze of those eyes.

Lady Leeson was gifted with great tact. She said nothing to her daughter as to dress, toilet, or even making her appearance. She took it all for granted in a serene, queenly kind of fashion, that nothing disturbed.

When evening came, Silvia fancied herself in a new world.

Cleve House had not been famous for the brilliancy of its entertainments, but here the gorgeous saloons and reception rooms were thrown open and brilliantly illuminated. She looked around on the splendor, the luxury, the magnificence.

“Who could believe,” she said to herself, “that a bankrupt earl lived here?”

She had no evening dresses, but she wore one of black-
crape, through which her beautiful shoulders and arms shone like snowdrops ; her fair, delicate face and wealth of fair hair made her conspicuously beautiful. Many gentlemen thought her the most lovely woman in the room. Lady Ianthe wore

a very beautiful dress of pale lilac, with bouquets of lilac fastening the white clouds of lace, and a superb wreath of the same sweet flowers on her head. Silvia looked anxiously for the two gentlemen. The rooms began to fill. Lord Monford was the first announced; his appearance pleased her at once. He did not look like a man too fond of money; he had a strong, shrewd, sensible face—clearly cut, intelligent, with firm, well-closed lips, and honest eyes. Perhaps not a young lady's most romantic ideal, but, for all that, a thorough English gentleman. She liked him at first sight.

"That is a man I could trust," she said to herself. She saw him go to Lady Ianthe, who received him very coldly, but he did not seem to mind that. She was thinking of him so intently, that it was almost a shock to her to find his eyes, full of admiration, fixed upon her. He said something to Lady Ianthe, evidently asking who she was. Then Lady Ianthe rose, and they crossed the room to speak to her. Lady Ianthe introduced them, and Silvia was surprised that Lord Monford seemed to ask nothing better than to sit by her side and talk to her; she never once remembered that the delicate, graceful loveliness of her face and figure was sure to attract all attention. Lord Monford was very pleased with her. He was just telling her some little anecdote when Mr. Raymond was announced, and Silvia looked up in haste, her face full of eager interest.

"Do you know that gentleman?" inquired Lord Monford.

"No," she replied, with some little confusion. "Why do you ask?"

"I fancied you seemed very much interested in him," he replied. Then her fair face flushed, but she could not tell him that interest arose from the fact that she knew they were rivals.

There was no coldness on Lady Ianthe's face now ; it broke into a thousand gleams of tenderness ; the light that came into it was dazzling in its beauty. No need to ask whom Lady Ianthe loved best ; there was not a tone of her voice, not a look of her eyes, that did not tell the secret.

Looking at the two men, and judging calmly, Silvia felt that Clifford Raymond was handsomer ; indeed, he was a model of manly beauty—few men surpassed him ; but his face had not the strength, the sense, the truth of his rival's. He looked like a man who could be easily led, who would sacrifice most things to his own pleasure and inclination ; there was nothing heroic about him.

“Every one to her taste,” said Mrs. Rymer ; “but Mr. Raymond is certainly not to mine.”

Some one else evidently considered him perfection. In his presence, Lady Ianthe was a different creature ; her very beauty seemed to take a new character, tender, sweet, winsome. More than once Mrs. Rymer saw Lady Leeson looking anxiously at her daughter, but she was too diplomatic to interfere ; the less attention drawn to them the better.

The gathering was a very brilliant one. Some of the most beautiful women and most celebrated men in London were there, and as Mrs. Rymer looked on the magnificence around her, she could hardly help thinking all Lady Leeson had told her was a dream. The interest of the evening culminated for her when the rival lovers stood one on each side of Lady Ianthe's chair. It must have been a trying position for Lord Monford, although he was too proud to show it. He kept his post bravely, despite the evident disfavor of the lady ; she gave all her smiles to Mr. Raymond, all her darker looks to him. Her voice, when she addressed Mr. Raymond, took the sound of a delicate silver bell ; to Lord Monford, it was cold

and abrupt. Silvia admired his bravery; he would not give in. He either did not or would not see her evident preference for his rival. Lady Leeson had watched the scene in something like agony for many minutes, then she crossed the room with an appearance of the most graceful *nonchalance*, and joined them.

Talk of tact, and of the tortures worldly women will bear with a smile; had her feet been standing on red-hot plowshares, Lady Leeson would have made no sign. She spoke a few words to Lord Monford, to her daughter, then turned with the most suave and sparkling grace possible to Mr. Raymond. She talked to him of Leesdale, of his parents.

"It is quite refreshing," she said, "to see a well-known face in this crowd. Have you seen the earl? He has been inquiring for you."

Mr. Raymond regretted that he had not seen him, and so fell into the snare so adroitly laid for him.

"Come with me," said her ladyship. "Lord Leeson positively wishes to see you, I know."

They walked away together; Mr. Raymond could not well refuse, but the look on his face was not a pleasant one. Lady Leeson took no notice of it; she talked gayly and cheerfully, though, if wishes could have slain him, he would not have lived long.

They went into the blue-room, where Lord Leeson was talking to some eminent statesmen. Most probably the tact of his wife was no secret to him, for he immediately turned his attention to Mr. Raymond, leaving men of great note and standing, to devote himself to his daughter's lover.

"I have not seen you for some days," said the earl. "Is there any news from Leesdale?"

And he entered into such a long conversation with him that

the young man saw there was no prospect of release. Lady Leeson returned to the drawing-room alone, and a smile of most cheerful and serene content overspread her face when she saw Lord Monford still by her daughter's side.

But Mrs. Rymer had seen enough to make her task seem a formidable one. There could be no longer the least mistake about it; Lady Ianthe loved Mr. Raymond, while to Lord Monford she was supremely and superlatively indifferent.

"How she is to be changed I cannot tell," said Silvia to herself. "I should not like to be the one to thwart her or contradict her. It seems to me too late for interference. In my opinion, she does not now, and never will, care for any man living except Clifford Raymond."

Lady Leeson managed so well that without seeming in the least to interfere, or without even seeming aware of what she was doing, she effectually prevented all further discourse between her daughter and her lover.

"I wonder," thought Mrs. Rymer, as she looked around on that glowing, brilliant scene, "if all society is as hollow as this? Here we have jewels, luxury, magnificence—and underneath, bankruptcy, torture, and suspense."

CHAPTER XXXII.

SILVIA'S OPINION OF LORD MONFORD.

LADY IANTHE HUTTON was proud and difficult to please, but the grace and sweetness, the goodness and truth of her companion had won upon her as nothing had ever done before. She began to love the gentle, self-sacrificing girl who was so anxious to do her duty, and to do what was right in every way. She talked to her familiarly, as she would have

done to her own sister ; the distinction of rank seemed no longer to exist between them. So, on this evening, when the visitors had all gone, and Lady Leeson, with a very dignified air, had retired to her chamber, Lady Ianthe turned to her companion.

"I do not feel sleepy," she said, "and you look quite wide awake—let us have a cup of chocolate in my room."

The maid was summoned. Lady Ianthe threw off the costly dress and brilliant jewels as though she were tired of them. Mrs. Rymer thought how beautiful she looked in her white wrapper, with that mass of fair hair falling like a veil around her.

"Now, Honor," said Lady Ianthe, "two cups of chocolate, and then you can go ; there will be no need to wait."

She looked so beautiful—with the spoon just touching the chocolate—a smile on her face, half-grave, half-mischievous.

"Mrs. Rymer," she asked, suddenly, "how old are you?" Silvia looked up in wonder.

"Twenty," she replied.

"That is very young to be left a widow with a little child ; what did you tell me your name was?—I have forgotten."

"Silvia," she replied. "It is an old-fashioned name."

"But a very pretty one," said Lady Ianthe ; "though, you are so delicate and graceful, Lilian, Violet, Grace, or some name of that kind would have suited you better. I am tired of calling you Mrs. Rymer—it does not seem natural ; you look too childlike to be *Mrs.* any one. I shall call you Silvia. May I ?"

"I shall be very pleased," said Mrs. Rymer, with a blush.

"Well, then, tell me, Silvia, how have you enjoyed this evening ?"

Her heart beat, for she saw what lay before her, and she did not half like the duty that had been imposed upon her.

"I have enjoyed it very much," she replied; "and, Lady Ianthe, as you are so kind to me, let me tell you how very much I admire a gentleman who certainly admires you."

Her whole face lighted with pleasure, her eyes brightened, her lips wore a soft, luminous smile.

"I thought you would—every one says so. He is so handsome—there is no one like him."

"I did not think him handsome," she replied; "but his face struck me as being very intelligent and clever, honest and true."

Lady Ianthe looked at her with an amused smile.

"You are the only person in the world who does not think Mr. Raymond handsome."

"Mr. Raymond!" repeated Silvia; "I was not thinking of him. I meant Lord Monford."

The whole expression of the beautiful face before her changed.

"Lord Monford—I never thought of him at all," she said, slowly.

"I must be true to my colors," thought Silvia.

"I admired him very much, Lady Ianthe; I saw so much that was sensible and good about him."

"Very possibly. I rather admired him, I think, before he annoyed me."

"Did he ever annoy you?" asked Silvia, gravely. "I am rather surprised at that. I thought him a true gentleman."

"So he is, in that sense of the word. Perhaps 'annoy' is too strong an expression. I mean, that quite unconsciously to himself he gave me some little trouble."

"He looks as though he would save you from all the trouble in the world, if he could," said Silvia.

"We will not discuss him. He is very worthy and good,

but he does not interest me. Now, Mr. Raymond is handsome; I think he has the most picturesque face I ever saw. I have known him a long time."

And into her beautiful eyes came an expression that seemed to say :

"Do talk to me about him; my heart hungers to hear his name."

"We were children together," she continued. "The Raymonds are near neighbors of ours, at Leesdale."

"He is handsome," said Silvia; "but his face does not look to me so trustworthy or so good as Lord Monford's."

Lady Ianthe became quite animated in the discussion, and all the time she talked her slender fingers clasped the golden chain.

"We are such old friends," she continued, after a pause; "and I think it is so natural to feel a warm interest in old friends."

"You have not known Lord Monford long?" asked Silvia.

"I never met him until this season; he is a friend of papa's, not of mine."

"Poor unconscious child!" thought Silvia: "how little she knows."

Lady Ianthe looked up with a smile on her beautiful face.

"Not only is he a friend of my father's," she continued, "but I have always classed him with my father. Either he must be very old, or I am impertinently young. Which is it, Silvia?"

"Lord Monford does not look forty," she said.

"Forty!" repeated the beautiful lips, in delicate scorn.

"Why, that is not only old, but ancient, Silvia."

"It is generally considered the prime of life," and then Lady Ianthe laughed heartily.

“I could almost fancy my lord had been bribing you,” she said, “but that you are too true; he could not have a warmer advocate.”

“I do certainly like him,” said Mrs. Rymer, “and I have a fashion of saying what I think.”

“But you do not like him better than Mr. Raymond, do you?”

“If I am to speak honestly, yes, I do.”

Lady Ianthe looked disappointed.

“Ah! that is because you do not know him. If you *knew* Mr. Raymond, you would see that there could be no choice.”

She was silent for a few minutes, then she continued:

“A good opinion is always worth having. Will you tell me, Silvia, why you, a stranger, who could have no possible interest in either, at first sight, preferred Lord Monford to Mr. Raymond?”

Silvia looked slightly distressed.

“I would far rather not answer you,” she said.

“And I would far rather know,” replied Lady Ianthe.

“It struck me,” said Silvia, “that Lord Monford had the face of a man who could be relied upon in any emergency—who would be calm, steady, and true. Mr. Raymond looks rather as though he would be frightened at an emergency, and get out of it, if he could.”

“But that would be very unmanly,” she said.

“Yes; I cannot help telling you what struck me with both, but I may not be right.”

“No,” said Lady Ianthe, warmly; “I do not think you are. I do not like this chocolate, it is not nice. I think I am tired, and will say good-night, Silvia.”

And Silvia knew by the sound of her voice that she was not only unhappy, but greatly perplexed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN OMINOUS DREAM.

A MONTH had passed away, and Silvia had most carefully kept her promise ; at every opportunity, and in every possible way she had spoken of Lord Monford. The result was that Lady Ianthe had ceased to dislike him, she even joined in praising him, and spoke well of him ; but as for love, she was farther from it than ever. Silvia saw that plainly ; she saw something else too—that not all the influence ever brought to bear upon her would induce her to give up Clifford Raymond.

Not that she spoke often of him—it would have been a far more favorable symptom if she had done so ; but that it was easy to see she had some deep, happy memory ever brooding in her heart—a something that seemed to keep her apart from the rest of the world—to make her quite indifferent to it ; and this something could only be love. Silvia never flattered. Lady Leeson trusted her implicitly ; and so upright, so honest was she, so entirely truthful and conscientious, that Lady Ianthe trusted her also, and she wronged neither.

Time, as it passed, brought no change, until one day the countess, with distress on her face, asked Silvia to come to her room again.

“We shall grow quite accustomed to these solemn conferences,” said her ladyship, with a weary smile. “This makes the third. Oh, Mrs. Rymer, what a comfort it is, what a blessing to be able to close that door and let my mask fall—not to be obliged to pretend any longer that I am happy, prosperous, or quite at ease !”

And the weary woman of the world flung herself into the

depths of a luxurious chair with a sigh that would have moved the coldest heart.

"I am so tired," she said, "oh, so tired of acting a part ! It would be a positive relief to me if I might say to every one, 'We are ruined beyond redemption ; there is no need for any further concealment. We are ruined ; say what you like about us.' Oh, the luxury of saying that—of feeling that there is no more need of concealment ! But it will never be, it can never be ; we must keep up appearances till we die."

"It is hard," said Silvia, with true, deep sympathy.

"Here is the worst of it," continued the countess ; "if that tiresome child would but marry Lord Monford, all would go well ; if she will not, another few months will see us ruined—completely ruined. We shall have to leave England, and hide ourselves in some wretched little place abroad. How shall we bear it ?"

"It may not come to that," said Silvia.

"It will—it is coming. I told you how delighted we were when Lord Monford laid his proposals before us. Did I tell you that my husband did not dare to tell him how scornfully they were rejected ? On the contrary, he said something to him about there being every ground for hope, but praying him to give Ianthe more time, and to let the matter stand over. That is two months since. This morning he has been to my husband again, and has asked plainly if we have any reason to think she is attached to Mr. Raymond ; if so, he says he will at once withdraw all pretensions to her hand. Of course, Lord Leeson said no ; nothing of the kind ; that they had been children together, and were attached to each other in a friendly way, nothing more. Lord Monford expressed himself quite satisfied, but asked permission to see Ianthe himself, and lay his offer before her.

“My lord could not refuse ; he appointed Saturday, putting it off as long as he could, in order that we might have time to reason. If she persists in refusing we are lost. Oh, Mrs. Rymer, help me to think what I can do to make her consent.”

Tears rose to Silvia’s eyes ; she felt grieved for the unhappy mother, and still more grieved for the daughter. There was a foreboding on her, too, that the worst had not been realized.

“What do you advise ?” asked the countess. “You have done your best, as I have both seen and heard. Do you think she cares any more about Lord Monford than she did ?”

“I will answer you quite truthfully,” replied Silvia. “I think she likes him in a friendly kind of way, but she is as far as ever from loving him.”

“Do you think she really loves the other one ?”

“Yes, she does indeed ; and if I can judge her rightly, she will never care for any one else while she lives.”

“What shall I do ?” cried Lady Leeson, despairingly.

“The only plan that I can suggest is to tell her the truth ; she will listen to it. She is naturally very noble, and would do anything, I am sure, to help you. Tell her the whole truth, and let her decide.”

“It will be such a shock to her,” said Lady Leeson ; “I can hardly endure to think of it. She has never had the faintest idea of it ; she has been accustomed to luxury all her life, and I shrink from telling her.”

“She must know it ; there is no alternative. You had better show her what depends upon her, and then she can decide. Lady Leeson, will you pardon me if I say something else ?”

“Say what you will ; I am only too pleased to talk to you,” said the countess, sadly.

Silvia's face flushed with the earnestness of her words.

"I think," she said, "that you quite misjudge Lord Monford. I am quite sure that he would never bring such entire ruin upon you for the sake of a little extra money. Instead of deceiving him with false hopes, tell him the truth, and trust to his mercy."

Lady Leeson laughed a bitter, satirical laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"You do not understand men of the world," she said. "Lord Monford would simply shrug his shoulders if such a thing were mentioned to him, and say it was a matter in which he could not interfere, as it was quite in the hands of his lawyers."

"I do not think it," said Silvia, earnestly. "I believe in faces, and his is so good, so true."

"You are romantic, Mrs. Rymer. Between a man's face and a hundred thousand pounds there is no connection at all. Lord Monford is neither better nor worse than his neighbors, but we have no right to expect him to be more generous."

"I feel convinced that he would be so, if you would but try him," persisted Silvia; but Lady Leeson only looked graver for her words.

"You must see," she said, at length, "that if Lady Ianthe refuses him, as I begin to fear she will, after that it would be impossible for the Earl of Leeson to whine out for mercy. If she could but be brought to accept him, all would be well."

"Ask her," said Silvia; and Lady Leeson looked up with a smile.

"That is the most sensible thing you have said yet. I will ask her at once. Go to her, Mrs. Rymer; tell her to come

and speak to me. Stop," added the countess. "I think you had better stay with us. Lady Ianthe is fond of you, and you have some influence over her. Will you stay with us while I talk to her?"

"If you think that I should be useful, and she would not resent it, I will do anything I can, Lady Leeson."

She found Lady Ianthe among the flowers. She looked up, with a bright smile on her face.

"How earnest you look, Silvia. I was just thinking of my dream. Do dreams ever come true, or, as the old women say, do they go by contrary?"

She stood caressing with her white fingers some rich crimson flowers as she spoke.

"What did you dream?" asked Silvia, quite willing to delay her message a few minutes.

"It is almost too foolish to be told. I dreamed that I was married—never mind to whom—and I stood turning my wedding-ring round on my finger."

"There is nothing very wonderful in that, Lady Ianthe. Most probably it will come true some time or other."

"But you have not heard the strangest part of my story, or rather, my dream. As I was looking at my ring, suddenly it changed into a small, living serpent, with bright eyes and a forked tongue, and it sprang at me."

"That was not so pleasant; but, dearest Lady Ianthe, it was only a dream."

"So I kept saying to myself. Yet it was not a nice one—it made me nervous; but I have been comforting myself by thinking that the ring I shall wear will be far more likely to turn into a beautiful white dove, and caress me."

She bent over the flowers and touched them with her sweet lips. Then Silvia said to her:

"Lady Leeson wishes to see you ; she is in her own room, and would like to see you there."

"I will go at once," said Lady Ianthe ; "it is not often that mamma sends so hurriedly for me."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN EMPHATIC REFUSAL.

LADY LEESON did not look as though the task before her were a very easy one. When her daughter entered the room she went up to her.

"Ianthe," she said, "I wish to see you particularly ; I have something to say to you."

"You forget, mamma, that we are not alone," replied the young girl, looking at Silvia.

"I have asked Mrs. Rymer to stay ; she is a good friend of yours, and will perhaps help you with a little counsel."

Lady Ianthe was most warmly attached to the gentle, beautiful girl, whose sad face and sweet voice had charmed her, but to one so proud as herself, there was something not altogether pleasing in her mother's words. She did not quite admire being talked to before one who, until lately, had been a stranger. She made no remark, but raised her eyebrows, and the countess understood perfectly what she meant. Still, Lady Leeson considered that Mrs. Rymer might prove a most useful auxiliary in the struggle that must ensue.

"I have sent for you, Ianthe," began the countess, uneasily, "because I feel a sure hope that the warmest and dearest hope of my life is about to be gratified."

"What hope is it, mamma?" asked her daughter, calmly.

“The hope of seeing you Lord Monford’s wife. How I have longed for it, you, Ianthe, will never know.”

“I am very sorry to hear it, mamma.”

“Why, my dear?—why be sorry for an idea that gives both your father and myself more comfort than any other idea could?”

“Because it is as impossible for me to marry Lord Monford as it would be for yourself to do so,” replied Lady Ianthe.

The countess raised her eyes in most pious horror.

“My dearest Ianthe, that is not a nice way to speak—it is not, indeed. You forget, my love, that I am a married lady. If I were not, and I were young enough to be honored by Lord Monford’s choice, all I can say is, I should accept him.”

Lady Ianthe laughed, and the sound, so like a chime of silver bells, gladdened Silvia’s heart. There could not be anything very grievous if the young girl could laugh so gladly.

“It is no laughing matter, Ianthe,” said the countess gravely. “Listen. Lord Monford has been with your father, and has renewed his proposals for your hand.”

“I hope papa has refused them,” said Lady Ianthe.

“On the contrary, he has, I believe, given his lordship some little reason for hope.”

“Why has he done so?” she asked proudly, “when he knows that I have once said: ‘No!’”

“You ask a pertinent question, my dear, one bearing upon the very heart of the matter. Your father did not refuse because it is his dearest wish, as it is mine, that you should marry Lord Monford. Our dearest wish, and we feel sure that you, our only daughter, will not refuse to make us happy.”

The beautiful face brightened, and the bright eyes grew dim with tears.

"I would do anything to please you, mamma—anything but this."

"Anything except the only thing we have ever asked from you," said the countess, coldly ; "the usual way with girls. They are all sentiment, ready to make any sacrifice, but the first favor asked from them is invariably refused."

Lady Ianthe looked imploringly at her mother.

"It is not so with me, mamma ; you know it is not."

"Then, my dearest child, listen to reason. You are our only child. You know how we have loved you, how we have always striven to please you, how every wish of your heart has been gratified, every least desire fulfilled. We have never thwarted you, never denied you anything—we have given you love, care, affection, and devotion. You have been our pride and our joy. Is it not so ?"

"Yes, mamma," she replied.

"And now," continued the countess, "for the first time, we come to ask a favor from you, to ask from your hands that which will make us happy—your marriage with Lord Monford. He is all that any one can wish ; I ask no fairer fate from Heaven for you, my dearest, than to see you his wife."

"But, mamma," said the girl, earnestly, "I do not love him—I do not, indeed."

"That would come, Ianthe ; no girl could see such excellence as his, and not learn to love him in time."

"But I should want some little love to begin with, mamma," said the girl, sadly.

"My dear Ianthe, I wish that I could describe to you all the nonsense that in this world passes by the name of love. Which is best and most dutiful—to yield to a set of morbid fancies, or to make two devoted parents happy ?"

"Marriage is not like anything else," said Lady Ianthe.

“Once contracted, there is no breaking the bond; it must last for life, and if the whole life should be unhappy—oh, mamma!”

“But there would be no need of unhappiness with Lord Monford,” persisted the countess. “If he were not all that he should be, I, for one, should object strongly; he is a gentleman, well-born, rich, of stainless character and high repute. What more do you want, Ianthé?”

“Some one to love,” said the girl. “I do not deny one of his excellent qualities, but I do not love him.”

“I detest the very word,” cried the countess. “If you do not love him, Ianthé, it is because you *will* not. I know no one more worthy of your love.”

Then Lady Ianthé rose, and went over to her mother. She knelt down by her side, and placed her hands caressingly on the countess’ arm.

“Mamma, dear,” she said, “you forget Clifford.”

“Forget *whom*?” cried Lady Leeson.

“You forget Clifford, my dear playfellow when I was a child, my dear lover ever since I have been old enough to know what love means.”

Despite her self-command, the face of the brilliant countess grew white with anger.

“I do not forget Mr. Raymond,” she said; “but I am too sure of my daughter’s affection to think she would let a person of Mr. Raymond’s position come between her parents and herself.”

“You always liked him, mamma,” pleaded the girl.

“When he kept his place, my dear, as the son of a worthy neighbor, holding a very inferior position, people whom we may one day assist. I need not say that I never dreamed of him as a suitable lover for the Earl of Leeson’s daughter.”

“But the earl’s daughter has learned to think of him in that light, mamma.”

“Then she must hasten to unlearn it,” said the countess. “Ianthe, my dearest daughter, be guided by me in this case—you will never repent it. See, all my life I have never asked a favor from you. I ask one now. For my sake and your father’s give up this absurd idea about Mr. Raymond, and, to please us, consent to marry Lord Monford—to please us.”

Lady Ianthe turned away her face, but not before Silvia had seen the distress and anguish upon it.

“There is no prayer I will not make to you. Oh! Ianthe, do not grieve me by a refusal.”

Lady Leeson’s hands trembled; her face was strangely moved in its earnest, pathetic pleading.

“No child,” she continued, “could refuse a mother’s prayer; and, Ianthe, I pray to you.”

Lady Ianthe clasped her white hands.

“You make it terribly hard for me—so terribly hard! Do you not see that I am quite willing to obey you, but that I *cannot*, for I love Clifford Raymond, and I am engaged to him.”

A little cry of dismay came from the white lips of Lady Leeson.

“Engaged to him! But, Ianthe, that is but childish nonsense.”

“Nay, mamma,” said the girl, earnestly, “it is the dearest love of my heart—I cannot give it up. I would do anything to please you. This would not be just, for it would make Clifford suffer even more than me.”

“He might be managed,” interrupted Lady Leeson, eagerly.

But she replied :

"No ; I love him, and I cannot give him up."

"Mrs. Rymer," said the countess, despairingly, "can you help me to bring this obstinate, willful girl to reason ?"

"Mrs. Rymer will not attempt it," said Lady Ianthe. "No good or sensible person would try to make any girl marry one man, while she loves another. My answer to Lord Monford is a firm and decided refusal, mamma ; I have no other to make."

"That answer I must take to your father, I suppose, Ianthe ?"

"If you please, mamma. I had hoped that his lordship would have taken my first refusal ; as he has not had the sense to do so, pray ask him, from *me*, to consider this as final."

"You will break my heart," said Lady Leeson.

"I do not think so, mamma, and I am sorry to displease you ; but in this matter of love and marriage, I must claim the right to please myself."

And with those words Lady Ianthe swept out of the room, leaving Lady Leeson and Mrs. Rymer together.

CHAPTER XXXV.

." IT IS TOO LATE NOW."

WHAT *am* I to do ?" asked Lady Leeson, turning with a look of surprise to Mrs. Rymer. "She will never listen to reason. What will Lord Leeson say ?"

"There remains the alternative I suggested," said Mrs. Rymer. "Tell Lady Ianthe the whole affair, and trust to her."

"It will be useless, I feel sure beforehand," said the countess ; "but, at least, I will try. Oh ! Mrs. Rymer, how full of trouble is life !"

As though any one living could possibly know it better than herself, Silvia almost wondered. It seemed to her that this trouble of bankruptcy of money was as nothing compared to the tempest of grief that had fallen over herself.

"I will go to her to-night," said Lady Leeson, suddenly, "and I will tell her all."

Lady Ianthe did not go down to dinner, and the countess looked very unhappy. It was such a desperate venture, and so much was at stake, that she was nervous and frightened; her only consolation seemed in talking to Silvia about it.

"A few more years—only a few more years," she said, "and all would be well. Lord Leeson says himself that five years' careful nursing would bring everything right. It seems too hard that our only child should stand between us and all comfort."

Silvia could not encourage her with hopeful words.

"At the worst," she said, "I have faith in Lord Monford; he will not let it come to the worst, I am quite sure."

But the countess had no faith in that belief.

"When a man's vanity has just been piqued by a scornful rejection of his love, it would be useless to appeal to his compassion," she said.

It was late before Lady Leeson fulfilled all her engagements and was ready to go to her daughter's room. Silvia met her in the long corridor, and it struck her that the picture she presented was not unlike that of Lady Macbeth. The countess wore a long, white wrapper, and she carried a lighted taper in her hand; her face was pale with watching, great dark circles were round her eyes.

She looked up at Mrs. Rymer.

"I am going on a difficult errand," she said, "to try to make a hard heart soft."

And with those words she passed on, and Silvia entered her room. But she could not sleep; she could think of nothing but the scene passing in that chamber. It was well for her that she was not present, for Lady Ianthe's distress was pitiable.

The countess found her reading, and remonstrated with her on the lateness of the hour.

"You will make your eyes dim, Ianthe," she said, "and lose all your beautiful bloom by reading at night; never do that, dear."

"I did not care to lie awake thinking," said the girl; "my thoughts are not happy ones, mamma."

"Nor are mine," said the countess. Then she placed the lamp upon the table, and knelt down by her daughter's side. Lady Ianthe would have risen; she cried out in distress at her mother's attitude.

"Not to me, mamma—I pray you, do not kneel to me," she said.

It was perhaps the first time in her stately life that the countess had ever given way, but she did give way now; she laid her head upon her daughter's knees, and wept aloud.

"Mamma!" she cried, anxiously, "what is the matter? I never saw you like this before. What has gone wrong? You terrify me."

But Lady Leeson made no reply, she only sobbed the louder; and Ianthe's face grew white with terror as she looked at her.

"Mamma," she said, in a low voice, "if you knew how you were alarming me you would speak; is there anything wrong?"

"Yes; there is so much wrong," sobbed Lady Leeson, "that only you can set right. My darling, our comfort, our

happiness, our well-being, I may say our lives, are in your hands, and I, your own mother, kneel here at your feet to ask you to have pity upon us."

Lady Ianthe bent down, and with her cold lips touched her mother's face.

"Do not cry so, mamma. I will do anything I can; is it—is it about that marriage?"

Then Lady Leeson sobbed out the whole pitiful story.

"No one can help us but you, Ianthe," she said, despairingly. "If you will marry Lord Monford, all will be well, and we need not fear; you will have rescued us from privation, bankruptcy—horrors that I dare not face—horrors that will kill me."

No word came from the white lips.

"Ianthe! Ianthe! I have never known such trouble as this, and, my darling, I cannot bear it; my life has been so brilliant, so luxurious. How am I to bear ruin?"

"But is it certain?" asked the girl, with a long, shuddering sigh.

"Certain as that Heaven shines above us," said the unhappy mother.

"Lord Monford would never proceed to such extremities; he does not seem so mercenary," said Lady Ianthe.

"If you humiliate his pride, and wound his vanity, by refusing his love," said Lady Leeson, "I leave you to guess what measure of mercy we may expect from him. Ianthe, there is no daughter living who would hear her mother praying for Heaven's sake, and refuse her prayers."

Her beautiful head drooped, and a look of unutterable despair came over the fair young face.

"If I had but known," she murmured to herself—"if I had but known."

“It grieves my very heart,” said the countess, “to urge you to this sacrifice of your love, but I know, that were I in your place, I should not hesitate, Ianthe; I should sacrifice my own love and inclinations to save my parents. I should not hesitate one moment between the two, and you will not hesitate, my own Ianthe.”

The countess clasped her white arms round the beautiful figure, she drew the white face to her own, she kissed the beautiful lips.

“You will not refuse,” she murmured. “You, the little child I nursed in my arms, my darling, whom I have loved and been so proud of—you will save us. I never doubted that you would do it when you knew the truth. I did not like telling you, Ianthe. You have never known a shadow of trouble, and I thought it might be averted.”

The bright head was bent still lower.

“If I had but known before, mamma,” she said. “If you had told me this when Lord Monford first asked me to marry him, I would have put all other thoughts away, all hopes of happiness, and dreams of love. *I would have married him*, and have saved you.”

“My dearest child, I knew it. Mrs. Rymer judged you rightly: she said if you knew all you would be guided by our wishes.”

“I would have been. Why did you not trust me? it is too late now.”

Lady Leeson looked up with a cheerful smile.

“No, my darling, it is not too late,” she said. “Oh! I am so thankful—so grateful, Ianthe; if I were to lay my life down for you it would not repay you.”

“You do not understand,” cried the girl; “I say it is *too late*——”

“And I,” interrupted the countess, with a smile, “say it is not too late. Your father was very careful—he said nothing of your rejection, so that it is not too late. Oh, Ianthe, if it were—if it were, I should kill myself, I could not bear ruin.”

The young girl shuddered—a long, terrible shudder, that seemed to make her whole frame tremble.

“Kill yourself!” she repeated. “Oh, mamma, what a terrible thing to say!”

“And a terrible thing to do, my darling; but death is easier for a proud woman to bear than disgrace.”

Slowly and gravely Lady Ianthe repeated the words after her:

“Death is easier to bear than disgrace for a proud woman.”

The words died away with a low moan on her lips. Then she rose suddenly, and with both hands pushed back the hair from her brow.

“Leave me now, mamma,” she said; “I cannot bear any more; I will think—I shall go mad if you say much more to me now. Leave me—leave me for two days, and then I will tell you—something.”

Looking into the agonized face before her, the countess saw that it would not do to urge the young girl any further. She kissed her, murmuring gentle caressing words over her. She laid her hands on the bright hair.

“My beautiful Ianthe,” she murmured, “my dearest child!”

But the despair in the young face grew no less.

“Do leave me, mamma,” she moaned. “You are very kind; but I cannot bear any more.”

“Good-night, then, my darling. I leave you a heart full of love and thanks; I leave you undying gratitude.”

But Lady Ianthe turned away with a low moan. The countess was not alarmed by her daughter’s depression.

“I did not think she cared so much about Clifford,” she said; “but sometimes those boy-and-girl attachments are serious affairs.”

The countess slept better that night than she had done for long. True, Ianthe seemed dreadfully distressed, but she would get over that in time, and all would be well.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

SILVIA sat in her room wondering and thinking, longing to help those whom she knew herself powerless to help. She could not bear to think of that young life, with its terrible blight—of the love that must bring unhappiness one way or another; she tried to think what she should have done in Lady Ianthe’s place; if in the sunny days of her happy love she could have given up her love—and she knew that death would have seemed a thousand times easier.

She was thinking so deeply that she did not hear the light steps that came nearer and nearer to her room door; not until the handle was turned gently did she realize the fact that any one was there. Nearly two o’clock in the morning—who could it be? She went quickly and opened the door. It was Lady Ianthe, who entered silently, closed the door, and turned the key.

“I want to talk to you,” she said, abruptly. “I could not wait until the morning, for it seems to me that I am going mad to-night.”

“It seems to me,” said Silvia, “that though the night is warm, you are shivering with cold. Let me wrap this cloak round you, and then you shall talk as long as you will.”

She felt the violent trembling that seemed to convulse the slender frame ; she saw the agony in the white face.

“ Dear Lady Ianthe,” she said, clasping the cold hands in her own, “ do not look so unutterably wretched ; there is always a silver lining to every cloud. The night can never be so dark but that the dawn comes after it.”

“ There can be no dawn for me,” said Lady Ianthe, and the voice was so hoarse, so changed, that Silvia hardly knew it ; “ no light, no dawn. I am lost. In all the wide world that the sun shines on there is no one else so wretched as I am.”

She sat quite still for some minutes, with a far-off, dreamy look in her eyes.

“ Any one who wishes me well,” she continued, “ could not do me a greater favor than in giving me poison, or throwing me into the sea.”

“ That is a morbid fancy, Lady Ianthe. Thousands live with a heavier burden than yours to carry, and yet they do not die, neither do they wish for death.”

“ You do not know how heavy my burden is,” said the young girl ; “ how should you ? No one knows it but myself. I have come to ask you a question, Silvia ; you will speak the truth—you always do. Lady Leeson has been with me to-night, and she has told me a strange tale—such a strange, sad tale. Silvia, it seems almost a terrible thing to say, but I am not quite sure if mamma has told me the simple truth, or if she has been playing upon me, she is so anxious for this marriage ; and yet she would not have wept bitterly as she did without some cause. Silvia, is it true—*can* it be true ?”

“ You mean about Lord Monford and the money. It is, I believe, perfectly true. Lady Leeson told me about it some time since.”

“True!” she repeated. “Oh! what am I to do?—what is to become of me? True! Oh, Silvia, I shall go mad!”

“Nay! There are greater troubles, and people live after them,” said Silvia. “You have but to decide between love of your lover and love of your parents. You have to choose between your happiness and theirs, and I will say the choice is a hard one—bitterly hard.”

“I have always been proud of my name and race—proud of my long descent. I have been proud of my father’s name and station, of his position, and of my mother’s queenship in the great world. Ours has been a stately race, Silvia, and it ought not to come to disgrace.”

“It could not,” said Silvia; “it would be like the falling of a bright star.”

“It should not if I could avert it,” said Lady Ianthe, despairingly. “Pride of race is strong in me; but, Silvia, it is *too late*. If I had known this story before, I would have sacrificed myself. I swear that I would have foregone every hope of earthly happiness to have saved my race; but oh, Silvia! how am I to tell you?”

“Do tell me, do trust me; I will do my best to help you. Why is it too late?”

“Because *I am Clifford Raymond’s wife!* I married him secretly, three months since.”

The words had a strange, almost startling, effect in the clear, silent night. Silvia heard them with a sinking heart, and Lady Ianthe seemed relieved at having uttered them. She went on rapidly, with a flushed face and bright eyes.

“I cannot tell what made me do such a thing. I cannot imagine how Clifford ever persuaded me. When I come to think it over, I am frightened at myself, frightened at what I have done.”

“It was wrong,” said Silvia, with a keen remembrance of how bitterly she had suffered for a similar folly. “I do not think that anything can excuse or justify such a thing.”

“Nor do I; now, when I plainly see the miserable position in which I am placed, I agree with you. But, Silvia, we were very much in love; we have been fond of each other since we were little children. We were sorely afraid of something happening to part us. Lord Monford made me an offer, and my parents seemed so anxious for me to accept it; while his father wanted him to marry some cousin. The only thing we could think of, to save us both, was a private marriage. How foolish it was, Silvia!”

“Are you sure it was a proper and legal marriage?” asked Mrs. Rymer.

“Yes; Clifford took care of that. I had received an invitation to spend a few days with a friend, who had a country house at Kew. I went and staid half a day at Greenwich; we were married at an old church there. All that I remember about it is, that it was surrounded by green trees. We were married properly; there was a license and a ring—even our own names. I do not understand much about such matters, but I do know that no marriage could be more binding than ours.”

“Mr. Raymond would be sure to attend to that,” said Silvia.

“We parted at the church door,” continued Lady Ianthe. “My husband came back to London, and I returned to my friends. We have met in society continually, at our own house, and elsewhere, but we have never had an opportunity of meeting to talk over what we should do over this marriage of ours.”

“That is a strange story,” interrupted Silvia.

"It was very foolish," said Lady Ianthe ; "but I love my husband, and I will not say that I regret it."

"See," she continued, drawing the little chain from her neck, and opening the silver bag, "this is my wedding ring. I have never dared to wear it, but I will put it on to-night. I have so often looked at yours and envied you because you wore it."

She little knew why Silvia's lips quivered as she smiled. She slipped the golden ring on the white finger, and looked at it with a loving smile. She bent her head and kissed the ring.

"If I dared but wear it," she said. "It was foolish to put it on, but I do love it so dearly—so very dearly."

Then a sudden shock of memory came over her, and she grew pale as death.

"I had forgotten for one half-minute," she said—"quite forgotten. Oh, Mrs. Rymer, what am I to do?"

"I dare not take upon myself the responsibility of advising you ; but if I were in your place, Lady Ianthe, I should certainly tell the truth."

But Lady Ianthe was so deeply engrossed in thought she did not seem to hear.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADY IANTHE'S FOREBODINGS.

SILVIA," continued Lady Ianthe, raising her eyes to her young companion's face. "Silvia, you must grant me one favor : you must see my husband for me."

Silvia shrank, with a scared expression on her beautiful face.

"I ! Oh, Lady Ianthe !" Then she paused for half a minute. "I will do anything for you," she answered. "I will see him if you wish."

"After to-night," said the young girl, "mamma's suspicions will most surely be aroused. She will watch me closely; she will not like me to leave the house without her. I know she will watch the letter-bag, so that I shall find it difficult to send a letter; yet I must communicate with him at once. He seemed more anxious than myself that all publicity should be carefully guarded against; that all chances of our secret being made known should be most urgently dreaded. Indeed," she continued, with a smile, "to show you what foolish children we were, we took an oath of secrecy to each other, so that neither of us can break it. It seems to me the time has come when that oath must be broken."

"I quite agree with you," said Silvia. "There is no further use in concealing the truth—it must be told."

"My husband must be told all that has passed," continued Lady Ianthe; "and we must arrange together what is to be done. Oh, Silvia, it will be a terrible blow to my dear mother—a most terrible blow!

"It will not be the simple announcement of the marriage that will grieve them so," said Lady Ianthe; "it will be the terrible ruin that must follow. Oh, Silvia! if I could but avert it. I feel now that I would give my whole life to help them."

"We must hope for the best," said Silvia.

She was obliged to take refuge in platitudes, for she was quite at a loss what to say.

"You must go," continued Lady Ianthe, "if you will, Silvia, to my husband's rooms, take a letter to him, and wait for an answer. You will not mind doing this for my sake, will you?"

"No," was the earnest reply. "Command me just as you will; for your sake I would do anything on earth."

"Then I will write my letter now, late as it is, before I go

to sleep ; and in the morning, before any arrangements can be made for the day, you can ask Lady Leeson for permission to go out ; she will think it is for some private business of your own, and will not say one word."

"I will do that," said Silvia ; "but, Lady Ianthe, are you not too tired for writing to-night?"

Lady Ianthe's eyes were bright as day.

"Tired," she said, with a low, bitter laugh ; "I have a terrible feeling over me, Silvia, that I shall never be tired again. I cannot explain it. A fever of unrest—a foreboding—what can it be? It seems to me that I shall never know rest, or peace, or quiet again. I have heard of some terrible feeling coming to people before death ; have you?"

"Do not say such terrible things," said Silvia ; yet, as she spoke, a cold shiver seized her. "Dear Lady Ianthe," she said, "do not talk of death—you are so young yet, with such a happy life before you."

"I do not think so. It seems to me that I am in such sore straits, nothing but death can help me. Look which way I may, there lies on either side nothing but misery."

"You will not be miserable with Mr. Raymond," said Silvia. "You will forget this trouble when you have been a happy wife for some time."

Lady Ianthe's face took that sorrowful expression that was yet so tender.

"Every time I look at my husband," she said, "I am afraid I shall remember that for his sake I broke my mother's heart. It *will* break her heart, Silvia, to lose all the prestige of rank and position."

"There will always be one source of comfort for you," said Silvia ; "come what may, you will have your husband's love to depend upon."

"I shall have that," said Lady Ianthe, "and I shall have nothing else. I shall be like a man who crosses a steep precipice, beneath which rages a boiling torrent, and has a slender plank to cross on; that plank is to me my husband's love. Should it fail me! oh, great Heaven! should it fail me, there is nothing to save me from the dark waters; and, Silvia, Silvia, I should be swept away in them. I can hear the rush of the torrent now!"

Silvia was almost frightened at the young girl's agitation.

"You are sure of it," she said, earnestly; "you must be sure of your husband's love as you are of Heaven."

"Of course I am. You see, Silvia, I am unnerved—quite unnerved. Why else should I doubt him who has ever been so kind, so loving, so true to me? I do not doubt him. I was mad when I said that. I do not doubt him; it was only a cruel, terrible, nervous fear."

Yet, though she spoke so bravely, though it seemed to her there could be no cause for fear, Silvia could not help thinking that some terrible doubt was eating her heart away.

The little clock upon the mantelpiece struck three. Lady Ianthe rose hastily.

"How unpardonably wrong of me," she said, "to keep you up so long. Do forgive me, Silvia. How selfish sorrow makes us."

"Let me go to your room with you," said Silvia, "you ought not to be left alone."

"No, I thank you. I will write my letter. My heart beats, my pulse is throbbing until it pains me; writing that letter will give me rest and do me good."

The earl's proud daughter clasped her arms round Silvia's neck; she bowed her beautiful head on hers.

“You are another plank, Silvia,” she said, gently, “but not strong enough to save me from destruction.”

With these words—sad, hopeless, almost despairing, she quitted the room, and Silvia remained alone to meditate on this problem of life. The world, after all, was the same, everywhere the same. In Cleve House she had begun to think that if a woman only married a man who was kind to her, fond of her, and patient with her, no more was needed for a life's happiness. Now she saw Lady Ianthe married—secretly, it is true—to a man she loved. Did happiness result from it? No; nothing could possibly result from it but misery and disgrace.

What *did* bring happiness? Not money, not rank, not position, not love—she had seen all fail. Her face grew grave and solemn; nothing, it seemed, of worldly origin—nothing of earth.

“And I used to think when I was a girl that every one was born to be happy, purposely to be happy, and for no other reason on earth. I have not been happy myself, only for a few short months. Who is happy?”

There came to her then, perhaps for the first time in her life, a sensation of longing for that bright, beautiful home above, where no sorrow and care ever enter—the heaven that rewards a good life and crowns duty.

She was only young, and had suffered deeply; her heart had been wrung with the anguish of betrayed love; the fair name and womanly purity that had been her pride, the crown of her girlhood, had been rudely torn from her and dragged in the dust. There was no hope left for her on earth. Her dreams of love, of happiness, of peace and honor, were all most cruelly ended; life blighted, hope betrayed and dead, were all that remained to her. But, as she stood there in the silence of

night, for the first time there came to her what seemed like a revelation—a longing for the better home, where no sin, no sorrow, no shame ever enter.

Silvia slept little that night; morning had dawned long before she closed her eyes, and then the dreams that came to her of Lady Ianthe were most terrible ones.

She did not like the task that lay before her. True, Mr. Clifford Raymond was very handsome, very accomplished, a man to touch any woman's heart, and win love; but she did not like him. It might be that she was prejudiced against him; but there was a weakness, a want of resolution, a kind of moral cowardice in his face that she did not like. Yet she had promised, and she must keep her word. It was still early in the morning when Lady Ianthe opened her door. Silvia was almost shocked to find that she still wore her evening dress and jewels.

"You have not rested at all, Lady Ianthe," she said.

"No; but I have written my fever all away. See, my hands are cold. I do not think I shall ever be warm again. You see the address, Silvia. My husband always keeps these rooms. When his family are in town, then he stays with them. Take a cab, and drive straight to Grosvenor Street; go early, that you may see him before he leaves home, and, oh, Silvia! remember my suspense, dear; it will be most terrible."

"I will do all that love and sympathy can do," she said.

"I will send to Lady Leeson at once."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DEATH-WARRANT.

MRS. RYMER wants to go out," repeated Lady Leeson, when her maid delivered the message. "I suppose I must say 'yes;' but really it is very annoying. Did she say how long she wished to be absent?"

"Until noon, I understood, my lady," replied the maid, who did not look upon Mrs. Rymer in any favorable light.

"Tell Mrs. Rymer that I hope she will not be later," and Lady Leeson turned, with a sigh, on her pillow.

In the present state of affairs she was learning to trust Mrs. Rymer above any one else. She had thought of rising and having a long talk with her, telling her all that had passed between Lady Ianthe and herself, taking counsel with her; but if she were going out, all those plans would be quite hopeless, quite in vain.

Silvia dressed herself, and in her plain mourning attire her delicate, graceful beauty showed to such advantage that she was almost ashamed of herself. No girlish emotion of happiness gladdened her heart, no thrill of delight at her beauty, no exultant feeling of joy that Heaven had made her so fair, came over her; she was more than ashamed of her loveliness, and something like afraid.

With the letter securely clasped in her hand, she walked to the nearest cab-stand, and was soon on her way to Grosvenor Street. The cab stopped at No. 39, and with a beating heart Silvia saw the house where Lady Ianthe's husband lived.

She asked for Mr. Raymond, and was told that that gentleman was not yet visible.

"I will wait for him," said Sylvia. "My business with him is very important."

She saw the mistress of the house making a grimace very suggestive of disapproval; but she knew that she must not mind trifles.

"Shall I say any name?" asked rather a pert-looking servant.

"No, I thank you," replied Silvia, with quiet dignity. "I am quite a stranger to Mr. Raymond; he would not know my name."

Then the landlady's face cleared.

"You had better go into the breakfast-room," she said. "Mr. Raymond will not be long now."

Before long the door opened, and Lady Ianthe's husband entered. He recognized Silvia at once, and went up to her with outstretched hands.

"Mrs. Rymer," he cried, "I never dreamed of seeing you. They told me a lady, but I felt sure it was only a subscription for a charity, or something of that kind."

Then a sudden alarm came over him, as he saw Silvia's grave face. "There is nothing wrong with Lady Ianthe?"

"There is nothing wrong," she replied. "I merely wanted to see you on business. You have not taken breakfast yet, Mr. Raymond?"

"No," he replied. "I was late last evening, but I could not think of detaining *you*, Mrs. Rymer."

"Take my advice," she said, "and drink some chocolate. I may detain you some little time."

She was charitable enough to remember that, in all probability, the letter she had with her would completely destroy all his chance of appetite.

She sat still while he drank the chocolate, and the more

she looked at the handsome face the more she disliked him.

“Lady Ianthe’s good sense must have failed her,” Silvia said to herself, “when she intrusted her happiness to one who looks so little trustworthy.”

Then Mr. Raymond came over to her. He had been casting very uncomfortable glances in her direction. He drew a chair close to hers, and spoke in a very subdued, uncomfortable voice.

“I can only repeat, Mrs. Rymer,” he said, “that I hope there is nothing wrong. You have brought me a communication of some kind from Lady Ianthe; I hope she is well.”

“I left her very well, but very anxious,” said the young girl. “Lady Ianthe desired me to give you this letter, to wait while you read it, and take back your answer.”

He took the letter from her hand, and she noticed that his lips grew pale and twitched nervously.

Silvia looked into the handsome face that was yet so wanting in what to her were the chief charms—power and frankness—then she continued :

“Lady Ianthe bade me say that she has been obliged to take some one into her confidence; therefore she has taken me.”

The pallor on his face deepened.

“So, you know all?” he said slowly.

“Yes. Lady Ianthe found herself compelled to trust some one, and she has trusted me.”

“Impossible to have made a better choice,” he said, with an awkward attempt at gallantry.

Then he unfolded the letter and began to read it. Even Silvia was surprised at its length; there was sheet after sheet

of closely-written lines. She watched him as he read, and for Lady Ianthe's sake her heart sank deeper and deeper.

There was no mistaking the expression of that handsome face; there came a lowering frown on the brow, an angry shadow in the eyes, the pale lips worked convulsively. He read in stern silence, then she felt sure that a muttered oath came from between his lips.

He crushed the letter in his hand, he walked restlessly up and down the room, then he turned a wild, haggard face to Mrs. Rymer.

"You were to take my answer back," he said.

"So Lady Ianthe wished," she replied, briefly.

"I do not know what to say. I am lost, bewildered; it is unexpected, and I was never less prepared. I do not know what answer to send; it is the most unfortunate state of things."

"It is trebly unfortunate for Lady Ianthe," said Silvia, gravely.

A great dislike was springing up in her heart for him.

"It is just as I thought," she said to herself; "just as I surmised. He is selfish enough to lead any one into trouble and difficulty, yet weak in emergencies, not to be trusted, and quite unable to help them out."

"I do not know what to do," he said; "I am quite bewildered. I must ask you to wait, Mrs. Rymer, while I think; there is no way out of my difficulties, that I can see."

He sat down again and seemed to engross himself in his own thoughts; they were not pleasant ones, as she could tell from the heavy frown, the muttered words, the restless swaying of the whole body. She was too indignant to offer any suggestions.

"Verily," she thought, "the earl's daughter has made a

strange choice—the man is a coward, afraid of the consequences of his own acts.”

And it struck her suddenly how frail was the plank that stood between Lady Ianthe and her destruction—how frail and insecure.

Then Mr. Raymond rose and went to his writing-table. He looked irresolutely at her.

“You are sure that Lady Ianthe wanted an answer now?” he said.

“Yes,” replied Silvia; “there can be no delay, as doubtless her letter tells you. Some course of action must be decided upon at once.”

He turned away impatiently and began to write. When once the letter was begun she could not help seeing how he warmed to the subject. He wrote rapidly, then laying aside sheet after sheet as he finished them, after the fashion of a writer hard at work.

Still Silvia, watching him, came to the conclusion that he was sending no comfort to her. He wrote with angry frown, biting his lips, and murmuring to himself the while. When he had finished he gathered up the loose sheets, arranged, folded, and sealed them in an envelope. He gave a great sigh, as of one whose mind is relieved from a heavy burden.

“I do not know how far Lady Ianthe has trusted you, Mrs. Rymer,” he said; “but, if you really have her interest at heart, if you are truly her friend, and she tells you the advice I have given her here, you will see that she follows it, you will advise her to do it. It is an unfortunate piece of business altogether, and that is the only way I can see out of it.”

As Silvia left the house she thought to herself:

“If girls and women could but see the nature of the men for whom they sacrifice themselves, how they would despise

them. Lady Ianthe would give up every earthly hope for him. He seems tired of the whole affair."

Then she began to wonder what was in this packet, what kind of news she was taking home to the young girl who was awaiting it so anxiously. She little knew that it was a death-warrant.

When she reached home some visitors were there, just going to luncheon, and Lady Leeson seemed pleased to see her.

"It is long past noon," said Silvia, contritely. "I am very sorry, Lady Leeson, but I was most unavoidably detained."

The countess was very gracious.

"Pray do not mention the delay, Mrs. Rymer," she said; "I am pleased to see you back again."

She could not deliver the letter to Lady Ianthe until dinner was over, for there was a constant influx of visitors. But at last she was able to put it into her hands.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CRUEL BLOW.

LORD MONFORD, with several other visitors, passed the evening at Dale House. It was not one of the countess's regular reception nights; incident or chance brought them together; but, as it so happened, Lady Ianthe found no opportunity of reading her letter. Only, once or twice, when Silvia passed her, she said, with a smile:

"My plank—I have not tested the strength of my plank yet."

Lord Monford was wonderfully kind and gentle that

evening ; his thoughtful consideration touched Lady Ianthe's heart.

"I hope to see you to-morrow," he said to her ; "I hope to hear some words from your lips that will make me the happiest man in the world. I am counting the hours until to-morrow comes."

She looked up at him with a faint, pallid smile he never forgot.

"The strong are always merciful," she said. "Will you remember that?"

He seemed surprised at her words, and hardly understood them.

"Mercy and *you* have but little in common," he replied, wonderingly.

It seemed to Lady Ianthe that their visitors would never go. She talked, laughed, played her part, as though no weight of lead was making her heart ache.

They went at last ; but even then Lady Ianthe was not free. Lord Leeson had been exceedingly pleased with Lord Monford's manner ; the advantages to be derived from his daughter's marriage with him seemed to increase with every moment. Then it struck him that as the countess had tried her eloquence, and tried it in vain, it would be as well now for him to begin. As his daughter was quitting the room, he said to her :

"Ianthe, spare me a few minutes this evening ; I want to speak to you."

Then she had the same scene to go through again—prayers, entreaties, expostulation, remonstrance, reproach, and passionate pleading. She could make but the same answer—she wanted time ; but the earl was not so easily managed as the countess ; neither tears nor anything else made the least im-

pression upon him. The question, to his practical mind, lay in a nutshell. Either she loved him, or she did not ; either she meant to marry him, or she did not ; a straightforward answer was wanted, and it seemed to Lord Leeson a very easy thing to do.

“ I do not think any man living can possibly understand a woman,” he said to himself. “ Now, why in the world cannot that girl make up her mind, in a sensible kind of way, to marry Monford, and put an end to all this nonsense? I suppose common sense, and matter-of-fact, straightforward dealing are quite beyond feminine capability.”

It was very long after midnight when Lady Ianthe left the earl and went to her own room. She was pale and exhausted.

“ I cannot bear this much longer,” she said. “ I am quite tired of my life ! ”

Then her own fanciful image of the plank came into her mind. A piteous sob rose to her lips.

“ I was blind,” she said ; “ I was foolish ; but I have my one plank to trust to. What will Clifford say ? ”

As she passed through the broad, fragrant corridors, a thought of what that letter might contain came to her mind. Love, warm, glowing, devoted love, such as would repay her for all this sacrifice and suffering. He would be sure to write as he had spoken in those happy days when the whole world seemed to center itself in their love. He would say that he should come and claim her now—come and take her away to a home of their own, humble, perhaps poor, but glorified and beautified by love. He would thank her for being so true to him ; he would console her in her sorrow ; he would bless her, love her, and thank her for her constant devotion. Her letter would tell her all this, and more, a thousand times more.

She longed to read it, and now she had had it in her possession all those hours.

“How time has changed me!” she thought, sadly. “I can remember when I had not the patience to wait for anything above half an hour.”

Then she drew her chair to the toilet-table; but the time for reading had not yet come. There was her maid.

“Shall I put away your jewels, my lady?” she asked.

Lady Ianthe was obliged to wait until the pearls were unclasped from her white neck, and from the coils of bright hair, and placed in their cases. Then there was the dress of pretty rose silk, with its lace trimmings; but her patience was ended now.

“Never mind the dress,” she said; “I will remove that myself.”

She was alone at last, and, with a great sigh of relief, she drew the letter from her pocket. A beautiful, tender smile played round her lips as she looked at the writing. She kissed the place where his hand had rested.

“My love!” she whispered; “I do not repent it; I will never repent it, for I love you!”

Then she opened the letter. No one could ever describe the last hour and the last thoughts of a condemned criminal; no one could describe the sensations of a drowning man. No one can tell what passed through the gentle heart of Lady Ianthe as she read that letter—her death-warrant.

As she read, her face grew ghastly in its white despair, a great cloud of darkness seemed to come over her eyes, her lips quivered, the hands that held the letter trembled; she rose once from her seat, but a great horror came over her—a great dread.

“I cannot believe it!” she said—“I cannot believe it! My senses have played me false—my eyes have read wrongly;

or it is a jest—a sorry, cruel jest that he plays upon me. Oh, Clifford! Clifford!”

She read it again.

“If I thought he meant it,” she said to herself, “I would never live to see another sun rise.”

Again and again, as though some secret charm held her, she read the closely-written pages. Again and again she tried to rise, but her strength had failed her.

“It must be true,” she said at last, in a hoarse voice. “He must mean it.”

Then, making a desperate effort, she went to Silvia’s room.

“Silvia,” she said, “I want you—I want you to see how the plank I trusted for my salvation has slipped from under my feet. Come with me, and read how faithful, how true, how stanch men are; how they reward the love of women; what they give in return when a life has been given to them.”

Silvia looked up in alarm at the agitated face, the burning eyes, the white, trembling lips.

“Lady Ianthe,” she said, “what has happened to you?—what is the matter?”

“Nothing very material,” she replied, with a bitter smile, “only the plank has slipped. I told you before that I heard the sound of rushing waters. Silvia, Silvia, they are closing over my head!”

Greatly alarmed, Silvia took her hand.

“I will go with you,” she said; “but, dearest Lady Ianthe, you must be composed; you will kill yourself with this agitation.”

“I wish I could,” she said—“I wish that I knew what would kill me—I would soon try it.”

They walked together to her room, and there, upon the floor, Silvia saw the sheets of paper—the letter that contained Lady Ianthe’s death-warrant.

CHAPTER XL.

THE COWARD'S SUGGESTION.

SIT down there," said Lady Ianthe. "Silvia, did you know that men were so treacherous and base—did you know it?"

Ah! Silvia bitterly realized how base and treacherous man could be! Who had suffered more from treachery than she had done? She was a simple country girl; this was an earl's daughter. Could it be possible that the same fate had overtaken both? She looked into that beautiful, haggard face.

"Does he, Mr. Raymond, *deny* the marriage?" she asked.

"No, he does not deny it—better for me a thousand times that he had done so. He admits it; but, oh! Silvia, I cannot—I cannot tell you. Read for yourself, and see what men are."

She gave the letters into Silvia's hands, and while Mrs. Rymer read, she flung herself with her face on the ground, moaning out that of all women she was the most wretched.

Silvia's indignation rose to something like furious anger.

"'My dearest Ianthe,'—so the death-warrant ran—'I, like you, am dreadfully distressed at the sad turn affairs have taken. I, like you, am utterly at a loss to know what to do. I, like you, am fearfully apprehensive of consequences.'

"The cowardly traitor!" murmured Silvia, to herself.

"'I am afraid, my dearest Ianthe, I must join you in saying that what we did was most imprudent. You ask my opinion as to what would be the best thing to do under the present state of affairs. Ianthe, I do not know. Look which way I will, nothing but ruin can follow the revelation of our

marriage. It could not be made at a more unfortunate juncture. You say that in this state of things you rely upon me. Alas ! that you have no stronger, no firmer source of reliance. I, for my part, feel quite helpless to advise.

“ ‘I am placed in these circumstances—but of course you know them. My father, not a wealthy man himself, has three sons and three daughters to provide for. I, as eldest, have of course the estate ; but that estate, as you know, is a very small one, and it will not be mine until my father’s death, and in all probability he may live twenty years longer. My allowance is five hundred per annum. Alas, Ianthe ! how can I support an earl’s daughter as my wife ! You see, my dear Ianthe, I am no fortune-hunter—I never was ; but when I persuaded you to take that fatal step, I was under the impression that, as the Earl of Leeson’s only child, you would have fortune enough to prevent our marriage from being deemed a *very* imprudent one. This revelation of the desperate state of the earl’s affairs takes me quite by surprise ; in fact, it ties my hands, and takes from me all power of acting.

“ ‘Then, knowing our circumstances, my father is very anxious for me to marry well. What he calls well, is some one with plenty of money. Of course, no alliance could be more flattering than a marriage with the Earl of Leeson’s daughter ; but if my father knew that that same earl was a bankrupt peer, it would make a great difference in his estimation. Remember, dearest Ianthe, I am speaking of my father’s opinions, not my own. For myself—ah ! well you know, Ianthe, what I think.

“ ‘*I dare not* tell my father what I have done ; I dare not, Ianthe, his anger would be so great. He would instantly stop my allowance, and then I should be penniless. That is what would follow the avowal of marriage on my side ; now

for yours. It seems to me that if you say one word, the most complete and utter ruin follows it—your father becomes bankrupt—ruin, misery, and despair.

“ ‘ Now, Ianthe, looking this quite calmly in the face, what can I think or say?—what can we do? Ruin follows any declaration of our marriage. It seems to me the only resource for either of us is to keep our secret still.

“ ‘ You will ask me *how* that is to be done? I ought to be the last man in the world even to suggest such a thing; but I see nothing else for it—nothing in the wide world. Let us, for instance, say that I write you a most romantic letter, saying I cannot live without you—and you know, dearest Ianthe, that is true. Suppose I urge you at all cost to leave home and join me, what happens then?

“ ‘ We are quite without money; we have no home, no prospect of getting one; it might be years before I could get the least appointment. During that time how could we live?—you especially, who have been brought up in luxury, and have never known privation or care?

“ ‘ It would be simple madness, Ianthe. You know it, I know it. We should not only go to ruin ourselves, but we should drag many others down with us; we should destroy many lives beside our own. I see but this one alternative—we must let that unfortunate marriage be as though it had never been.

“ ‘ You will shrink from this. So do I—I cannot tell you how much; but I see no alternative. Do you understand me, Ianthe? No one knows our secret; it cannot be known; it is as safe as though we were both dead. Then, what I propose is this; but before I write it—O Ianthe, Ianthe, my love, how it grieves me!—before I write it, let me tell you how dearly I love you, and how, from the very depths of my heart, I grieve for this untoward aspect of affairs.

“ ‘This is my proposal, Ianthe. Let that unfortunate marriage go by as though it had never taken place. We need not mention it. There may have been some informality in it that renders it null and void—I cannot say. We, who contracted it, will render it null and void by our own free will—we will annul it; and then we can each follow the path that seems best for us.

“ ‘Do not think, Ianthe, these words cause me no pain; they do—a most bitter pain. When I remember how dearly I have loved you, how bright and glowing my hopes were on the morning I married you—when I think of our plans and hopes, my heart is bitter as death; but I have common sense, and I see no help for it.

“ ‘So, Ianthe, you must look upon what we thought marriage simply as a betrothal, and from this betrothal I release you; I release you from every promise you have ever made to me; I release you from every tie of fidelity; I ask nothing from you but a place in your memory.

“ ‘That is my proposal. Consider it well, Ianthe. It gives you freedom, liberty, wealth, the power of pleasing your friends; it gives me the ability to please my father. Take into consideration that our marriage was a mistaken one; that we were led into it through error over your father’s position; that had we known at the time the reality and truth, we should neither of us have dreamed of marriage. Consider another thing—that married in that secret, underhand way, there may be some flaw that will render that marriage quite invalid.

“ ‘You see, Ianthe, that this is the only feasible plan I can suggest. Now for your objections. First, it will necessitate our parting. That, we cannot help; as circumstances are, we *must* part. Better that than to drag many others into an abyss

of misery. It will be hard, but we can be friends, and no one knows what the future holds in its grasp.

“ ‘Another objection that you will perhaps make, is, that it is not right. That, Ianthe, is a mistake, a false scruple, founded on false notions ; there is no sense in it. Our marriage, as I have said before, was a betrothal ; the fact of its secrecy made it so ; and from the pledge of a betrothal we may always release one another.

“ ‘You will break no moral law in my eyes. There is nothing like having a good, bold, intellectual grasp of those things. You will do no wrong if you join with me in annulling this contract of ours. It concerns no one else but ourselves.

“ ‘Having laid my thoughts very clearly before you, Ianthe, I now offer you the best advice I can ; *accept Lord Monford's proposals*. You will secure wealth and everything else except love ; and, remember, life holds many chances. I cannot allude more plainly to what I mean. Marry Lord Monford, then you will have taken the best possible precaution for yourself. I think, Ianthe, that I shall go abroad. I find that I love you too well to stand by quietly and see you married to another. I find my heart heavy, and my whole soul sad.

“ ‘I shall in all probability go soon, and then you will know that the waves of the sea—the whispers of the wind, are not more free than you to do as you will. Perhaps, Ianthe, under these circumstances, it will be better for you to destroy all letters, and all trace of correspondence. This, the sweet, hidden romance of our youth, will always bring bitter pain with its memory ; but to me it will be the sweetest, dearest, and most precious portion of my life.

“ ‘Now I must say farewell, Ianthe. This is not what we dreamed of that bright morning ; but fate and fortune have

been too strong for us. There is nothing for us but philosophical resolution. Rest assured of one thing, Ianthe, *ours* is not the only romance of the kind to be found in the world. If we could only read the secrets of hearts, we should know there were many other such secrets as ours.’”

CHAPTER XLI.

REPROACH, MISERY, AND DESPAIR.

“MY opinion of Mr. Raymond,” said Silvia, “is most decidedly that he is mad. I can see nothing else for it.”

But the beautiful, unhappy girl, crouching on the ground, moaning out the wretchedness of her lot, made no reply.

“He must be mad,” continued Silvia; “no man in his senses could be so devoid of principle, of morality, of common sense, of every good and righteous impulse. He must be mad, or——”

Then she paused, and Lady Ianthe raised her haggard face.

“Or what?” she asked.

“Or he must know of something that makes the form of marriage you went through null and void.”

She shook her head, with a low, desponding sigh.

“It is not so, Silvia,” she said. “I can distinctly remember, as we stood in the vestry that morning, he turned to me and said :

“‘That has been managed very quietly and cleverly, Ianthe. No soul knows anything of it; yet we are as securely married as though the Archbishop of Canterbury, with every dean in his diocese, had helped to marry us.’

“I remember, Silvia, that he used those very words. Rely

upon it that whatever else was wrong, *that* was right. Oh, Silvia, Silvia! was ever pride brought so low as mine? I gave him my life, and he lays it down as easily as though it were a faded flower. Oh, Silvia! was ever woman brought so low?"

"If I were a man," said Silvia, in a low, clear voice, "I would follow him and shoot him."

Lady Ianthe held up her hands with a shudder of dismay.

"Hush!" she said; "I have loved him. He was my hero once, as the husband you loved was your hero. I cannot endure to hear such words, because it makes me think the man I loved so base—I cannot hear them."

"He is base," said Silvia, indignantly. "I have heard of many cruel cases, of many bad and treacherous men, of many who have been wanting in principle and morality, but I never heard of one so utterly, so contemptibly base."

Lady Ianthe clasped her hands with a low moan.

"You are killing me, Silvia," she said; "you are killing me."

Seeing the torture of anguish in that white face, Silvia laid the letter down and bent over the hapless girl.

"Pray forgive me," she said; "my great anger made me forget myself. We will talk no more of him, but of you. What shall you do now?"

"Die!" she replied, in a voice so hoarse and terrible that Silvia was frightened. "Die! there is nothing left for Ianthe—but death. What can I do, Silvia? Let him say what he will, that marriage was a true one, and I must abide by it. Because the obligation sits lightly on him, it is no reason why it should sit lightly on me; because no moral law or moral force binds him, that is no reason why it should not bind me. I cannot throw off all restraint as he has done."

“No,” replied Silvia, “you cannot; you must abide by the marriage.”

“Then if I look my position plainly in the face,” said Lady Ianthe, “what do I see? I am the daughter of one of the proudest peers in England; yet such a man as Clifford Raymond’s father would make his son penniless for having married me. I am the lawful wife of a man whose only anxiety is to be free from me, and who treats his marriage with me as an absurd joke—a jest; a mere empty ceremony that he can annul at his pleasure.”

She paused—for the vehement passion of her own words frightened her.

“Can I go to my father and tell him that I am Clifford Raymond’s wife, when Clifford himself tells me that I am free—can I even trust him? If I told my father that I was married, would he not deny it? Then how could I survive the disgrace?”

She fell shuddering again, moaning out what had she done that she was so heavily punished, crying out that she could not bear it—that it was too cruel.

“I shall never mention that marriage,” she said, when her violent passion of grief had abated. “I shall never mention his name; no one shall know how he dared to win me and throw me off because my father’s circumstances were different to what he thought them; no one shall know the depth to which I have fallen; the cruel blow that has slain me; yet shall I abide by that marriage, as a true and lawful one before Heaven.

“Oh, Silvia, Silvia! is there anything for me except death? I cannot set aside the marriage, nor can I own it. I cannot be untrue to the man I call my husband, neither can I appeal to him for the protection of his name. I cannot marry Lord

Monford, neither can I tell my parents why I cannot marry him. I must refuse in this, the great crisis of their lives, to help them, yet I cannot tell them why I refuse; they will think me cold and heartless, yet I cannot tell them my heart is broken. Oh, Silvia! there is nothing but death for me!"

"Nay," said Mrs. Rymer. "Remember what even *he* says: 'Life holds many chances.'"

The haggard face was raised to hers.

"Chances yet; but not when one has deliberately shut herself from all chances, as I have done. What can life hold for me? Not love. Oh, cruel word! What is so cruel in all this world as love? Not love, for my heart is broken; not marriage, for I am married to one who gives me my liberty, as he would give away an old garment; not pleasure, not happiness, not even comfort, not the luxury of helping others. Life holds none of these things for me."

Silvia knew it was so, and could answer never a word.

"Shall I tell you what life holds for me? Shame, ruin, reproach, misery, and despair."

Silvia murmured some words about duty. The girl laughed derisively.

"Duty! To what—to whom? To the parents my folly must ruin? to the husband who tells me that my marriage was only an empty engagement? Duty! How can one remember that, when the very landmarks of life are torn away?"

She pushed away the heavy cluster of hair that lay over her brow.

"Silvia," she said, piteously, looking with sad eyes in the gentle face bending over hers, "Silvia, I can remember in the happy life that seems to me so far back, I was so proud of being beautiful. I am beautiful now, am I not?"

There was such wistful sadness in the voice that Silvia knew how far there was from being any vanity in the case.

"You are very lovely, Lady Ianthe," she replied.

"Beautiful, well-born. Oh, Silvia, tell me what these gifts were for. They have not made me happy, dear."

"Because," replied Silvia, gently, "in your life there has been a terrible mistake; but that mistake was of your own making."

"I know it; there is no help, no remedy for it. I must abide now by its consequences."

There was silence, terrible in its intensity, that lasted for a few minutes; then Lady Ianthe caught Silvia's hand in a passionate grasp.

"What am I to do when to-morrow comes?" she said; "Lord Monford is coming for my answer. My father says that, in spite of this little drawback of want of will, he is sure that I shall do what is right. My mother, as she kissed me to-night, told me that I was the dearest and the best, that she knew very well what my answer would be. What am I to tell them, Silvia?"

"Must I," she continued, wildly, "must I let them think me heartless, cold, cruel, ungrateful? Must I let them all believe I prefer my whim to saving them from ruin? I cannot, Silvia, I cannot; there is but one way out of this for me."

There came back to Silvia's mind vividly, as though it had only happened yesterday, the memory of her own temptation, of the time when she had sat in the little grave-yard, only longing for death—when she, too, saw no other way out of her trouble. Every word the gray-haired minister had spoken to her came back to her mind. She went up to Lady Ianthe and clasped her arms around her.

"You must not think of that," she said; "you are thinking of escape by death."

"I am," said Lady Ianthe. "My own mother said a proud woman prefers death to disgrace. I am proud, and I prefer it."

Word by word Silvia went over the same arguments that the kind-hearted minister had used to her, but Lady Ianthe did not even seem to hear them; her beautiful, haggard face never once softened. Just as Silvia hoped that she was making some impression on her, she said:

"I cannot reproach him, Silvia. How is it I cannot make up my mind to say or to hear one word against him? I must have loved him very much indeed, even more than I thought I did."

And when Silvia began again, Lady Ianthe interrupted her.

"You are very good, Silvia, very kind; but leave me now, dear. I shall remember what you have said."

CHAPTER XLII.

A TERRIBLE SHOCK.

BUT Silvia was unwilling to leave the unhappy girl. "Lady Ianthe," she said, frankly, "I am afraid to leave you. Will you promise me to go to rest?"

The gray shade deepened on her face.

"I promise you," she said, wearily; "let that content you. I will go to rest."

And it never occurred to Mrs. Rymer that she laid a strange emphasis on the ominous word—rest. Just as she was leaving the room Lady Ianthe caught her arm.

"Silvia," she said, "I was almost forgetting one thing. I

want you to promise me—not a light promise, but an oath—you must take your oath to me that let what may happen you will never reveal one word of what I have told you.”

“Will not my word suffice?” asked Silvia, quietly.

“No! Ah, me! ah, me! what is the word of man or woman worth? Give me your oath, Silvia! Life, as my chivalrous lover says, is full of chances; no one knows what may happen. Swear to me, that if by good or evil fortune anything happens to me, and my secret is suspected, swear to me that under no circumstances, under no compulsion, will you ever reveal one word of what I have told you—you must swear.”

Holding Silvia's hand in her own, she made her take an oath so solemn that she knew it could never be broken.

“Now go, Silvia,” said Lady Ianthe; “I have so much to do. I must destroy those letters, so as to leave no trace behind of the hidden romance, the wonderful romance of my life. I have one or two letters to write. Leave me, dear. Good night.”

Long afterward Silvia remembered how Lady Ianthe clasped her white arms round her neck and pressed her cold lips to her face.

“You are very kind to me,” she said. “Go now, dear; it will soon be morning, and I have so much to do.”

Silvia went, feeling more at ease than she had done for some time. Lady Ianthe had promised to go to rest. Perhaps, after all, the terrible trouble might in some way be averted. She slept, because she was exhausted, and did not wake until long after the fatal morning had dawned.

Lady Ianthe's face changed again as the door closed after Silvia; the coldness and despair seemed to leave it; warm, lovely flushes of color glowed over it.

“I was such a happy girl,” she said to herself; “such a happy girl.”

She was like one taking some last view of a picture, a bright and beautiful picture. The light lingered on her face as she looked at it, then a great sigh came from the over-charged heart, a terrible sigh, as she turned away. She had finished with that picture forever, then.

She went to one of her drawers, unlocked it, and took from it a packet of letters. Only Heaven knew what those letters had been to her once; how full they were of love, of vows, of tender words of treachery and untruth. They were tied with blue ribbon, and it was the first time in her life that she had ever touched them without passionate kisses, loving words.

Now she took them and deliberately tore them to pieces, tore them into a thousand shreds. There was no softening of her face as she did so, a terribly strange mask had fallen over it. When the heap of white paper lay before her she opened the window, and let the wind carry the fragments slowly away.

She stood there, perhaps, for an hour. It was the hour before dawn, and the wind was high. It took the fragments of paper and whirled them over the tops of houses, over the trees, scattered them far and wide, yet not so far as the hopes with which they had been read had been scattered.

She listened to the distant chiming of the church clocks, and never a prayer that Heaven would have mercy on her soul came from her lips.

Then she went to her writing-table and wrote two letters; she addressed them, leaving both envelopes open.

In that same writing-table there was a little drawer, a secret drawer, which she opened now, and from which she took a small bottle. How she came by it seemed wonderful at first,

until some one remembered that long ago she had suffered from neuralgia, and this medicine had been prescribed as a cure. She held the little bottle in her hand.

“How I have suffered before I could do this. My heart is broken, my strength has left me. My love has grown cruel and cold, cruel and cold. I wonder what comes—hereafter.”

* * * * *

It was late when Silvia Rymer awoke that morning, a beautiful summer morning, the sun shining brightly, the birds singing, the flowers blooming fair; morning that seemed to bid all hearts rejoice, because nature, fair, sweet nature was so bright. She did not feel particularly anxious over Lady Ianthe. It frequently happens that after dreading a catastrophe for some long time, a certain calm and peace falls over us just before it happens. So it was with Silvia; she had long felt very unhappy over Lady Ianthe, but on this morning, when the very worst had happened, she felt no particular misgiving over her.

The house seemed unusually quiet. Silvia was at first apprehensive that she might have overslept herself. She hastened down stairs. The earl had taken breakfast and was in his study.

“My lady was still in her room,” the maid said; “she was tired this morning.”

“Where was Lady Ianthe?” asked Silvia.

Lady Ianthe’s maid told her that her mistress was not yet awake.

Silvia thought to herself that she was pleased it was so; she was evidently forgetting her troubles in sleep.

Silvia took her breakfast, and then looking at her watch, saw that it was after ten. It occurred to her that after all that exhaustion and emotion Lady Ianthe would be glad of some tea. She filled a cup and took it up to her.

The rule of the house was that no maid should enter the rooms belonging to the ladies until they were rung for. Lady Ianthe had not rung, so Lady Ianthe's maid had not entered.

Silvia rapped at the door, but no answer came ; then she tried it gently and found it was not locked, only secured by a little bolt. She pushed it—still there came no sound.

“Lady Ianthe,” she said, in a low voice.

There came no reply. She went in, and to the day of her death she never forgot the terrible shock that came over her as she saw that silent figure in the chair, a shock that seemed to drive the blood from her heart, and the strength from her limbs.

“Could she have fallen asleep there ?” cried the girl to herself.

“Lady Ianthe,” she said again. Still no answer came ; but as Silvia ventured one step forward in that silent room, there came to her a faint perfume of almonds.

She put the cup down and went to the chair. One glance at that ghastly face was quite enough. With a cry that seemed to echo through that silent house, Silvia ran down to Lady Leeson's room.

“You cannot come in,” said the maid ; “my lady is dressing.”

But Silvia hastily pushed past her. Lady Leeson looked up with a face of alarm.

“What is the matter, Mrs. Rymer ?” she asked.

Silvia tried to speak, but the shock and the fright had been too great for her ; she raised her hand and fell fainting at Lady Leeson's feet.

CHAPTER XLIII.

.SILVIA'S DISCLOSURE.

THE countess looked at her maid in great perplexity.

"Surely this is very strange," she said, "to rush into my room and faint at my feet in this way. It is very unlike Mrs. Rymer. Call some one to help you, Fraser."

Another maid was called, and they raised Silvia and placed her on a chair.

"I cannot understand it," said Lady Leeson. "It is so unlike Mrs. Rymer."

Suddenly another idea occurred to her. She turned to her maid with a pale, scared face.

"It can never be," she said, "that anything has happened to Lady Ianthe. Go to her room, Fraser. Tell her that I want her."

The countess sat waiting, frightened, she knew not why, when another terrible cry came from that room. She rose from her seat, pale, trembling.

"Something has happened," she said. She went to the door of her room. Lord Leeson was hastily ascending the staircase.

"What does all this noise mean?" he asked. "Have all your maids gone crazy together?"

"There is something wrong," said the countess, with clasped hands, "and I am afraid it is in Ianthe's room."

"They have seen a mouse, or heard one," said the earl, impatiently. "It is nothing worse, I am sure."

But the words died on his lips as he saw Fraser, his wife's maid. Fraser was a staid, sensible woman, not inclined to nervous fears.

"Oh! my lord," she said, "pray take my lady away; something terrible has occurred."

Lord Leeson was warmly attached to his wife, but in this moment of anxiety he quite lost sight of her.

"Is it Lady Ianthe?" he asked; and the woman replied with a burst of passionate, hysterical tears.

Lord Leeson pushed the weeping woman aside, and ran up to his daughter's room. His wife heard one terrified cry of, "Oh, my God!" and then a painful silence.

She would have followed him, but Silvia, who had by this time recovered, took her by the arm.

"Do not go there, Lady Leeson," she said; "come back to your own room."

Unresisting, haggard, silent, the poor lady did as Silvia wished. She sat down and looked at her, with a face that was terrible to see.

"Will you tell me what is the matter, Mrs. Rymer?" she said. "I could never bear suspense. What has happened to my daughter? She is not ill. Last night I kissed her beautiful face and she was well. Has she—has she run away—perhaps I pressed her rather too hardly—has she run away?"

If it only had been that!

"No," replied Silvia, gently. "Lady Leeson, I *cannot* tell you; you had better hear it from your husband's lips."

The gray shade that came over her face was terrible to see.

"Is she ill—dead?" Oh! Mrs. Rymer, tell me! She is dead; I know by that look on your face. Oh, my child! my darling!"

Over such a scene draw a veil. Lady Leeson was a brilliant, worldly woman, but she dearly loved her daughter—how dearly she did not know until death stepped in and took her only child from her.

“Have I driven her to death?” she asked, with such wild eyes that Silvia answered at random :

“No ; it is an accident. Nothing more dreadful than an accident.”

The confusion and despair that reigned in that luxurious mansion was something terrible to remember, impossible to forget. Doctors, servants, friends, all in the wildest confusion ; but there was nothing to be done. Lady Ianthe had been dead for hours.

While the earl was alone with his wife, trying his best to comfort and console her, Silvia stole back to the room where the beautiful, silent figure was lying.

She unfastened the golden chain from the white neck, and, with the wedding ring, took it away. She kissed the lovely face, so glorious in its marble beauty.

“I will keep your secret for you, dear,” she said—“the secret of your most unhappy love.”

Then it occurred to her that she had better go at once to Mr. Raymond, and tell him what had passed before he had an opportunity of hearing it from others. Now that the young life had ended, it seemed to Silvia that she ought to take every precaution that the secret for which she had died should be kept.

In the hurry and confusion it was not probable that any one would notice her absence, and she knew that if those dead lips could have spoken, their first command would have been : “Go to him.”

She left the house unnoticed and unobserved. She went again to the cab-stand, and told a driver to take her to Grosvenor Street.

Mr. Raymond was still at home—it was not much after noon. The confusion, the terror, the dismay, that takes so

long to describe, were soon over : the death of our nearest and dearest often passes in the shortest space of time.

The landlady looked at her a trifle more dubiously this time ; it seemed to her there must be something strange in this speedy return.

“ You want Mr. Raymond again ? ” she said. “ He is in his room ; he has finished breakfast, and is going out, I think.”

Silvia went to the breakfast-room.

“ Come in,” said the voice she remembered so well : but when she did enter the room, that gentleman regarded her with no very pleasant expression of face.

“ Mrs. Rymer,” he said ; “ a most unexpected visit.”

Silvia was in no humor for wasting words.

“ I am far more sorry to come,” she said, “ than you can possibly be to see me.”

She threw back her veil, for the very air of the room seemed oppressive to her. He saw the white face, with its expression of anguish and terror.

“ Another complication,” he said. “ What has happened now ? ”

“ The best thing possible for you,” she replied bitterly, “ and the worst for her.”

“ What is it ? ” he asked, impatiently.

Silvia laid the little golden chain, with the wedding ring on it, before him.

“ Lady Ianthe will trouble you no more,” she said, solemnly. “ You are free to marry, to woo, to love as you will.”

His face lighted with satisfaction.

“ She has decided wisely,” he said ; “ it is painful, but it is the wisest course.”

"Lady Ianthe did not decide as you think," replied Silvia, with ill-concealed contempt; "*she* was more indignant than ever I can describe that you should dare to hint at such a proceeding to her. Whatever you may say, *she* considered the marriage binding before God and man. She would not hear of anything else."

The handsome face grew pale, and an impatient frown came over the broad brow.

"What does she intend to do, then? What does she propose?"

"She proposes nothing," replied the solemn voice; "she means to do nothing. She has left you free."

"I cannot understand you, Mrs. Rymer. I am not good at puzzles."

"Your letter killed her," said Silvia. "It was her death-warrant."

He sank back white and breathless.

"You cannot mean to say that Lady Ianthe is *dead*?"

"I mean what I say," said Silvia; "your letter killed her. When she most needed your love, when she most relied upon it, when it stood between her and despair, when it was her only hope and refuge, you took it from her, and made the basest proposal man ever made."

He did not offer to stop that torrent of indignant words.

"You forgot she was a pure, proud woman, mistaken in her love for you, but in every other respect worthy of a man's most devoted love. You forgot that when you made such an insulting proposal to her."

"Dead!" he repeated. "Mrs. Rymer, I cannot believe it. How did she die?"

He asked the question in fear and trembling, she saw that.

"Her death, as the great and fatal event of her life—her

unfortunate marriage—must remain a secret between us," she said. "The world will think she took an overdose of medicine—I tell you she poisoned herself."

"Poisoned herself!" he gasped. "Oh, Mrs. Rymer, it cannot be!"

"It is the truth," she replied; and then she gave him the history of her night's conversation—her pleading, her entreaties; she did not spare him one single word. She told him everything Lady Ianthe had said, and no compassion for him arose in her heart, when she saw the tears in his eyes.

"So that, you see," she continued, "your letter killed her; it drove her mad, and she destroyed herself. You failed her in her hour of utmost need, and that failure has slain her."

She felt no pity for him even when he bowed his head on his hands and wept most passionate tears.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

SILVIA sat watching Clifford Raymond in silence.

"It is a great pity," she said, "that one spark of that compassion did not animate you before."

"Do not be hard on me, Mrs. Rymer," he said; "I am wretched enough, God knows. I did not expect this, nor did I ever dream it would happen."

"A man never knows where his evil deeds will end," said Silvia. "Yours began when you persuaded Lady Ianthe to take that most foolish step of a private marriage; the most cruel deed was when you wrote her that letter. If I had known its contents, I would have burned both my hands off before I would have touched it. How could you do it?"

"Do not reproach me," he cried; "I shall never know another happy moment—my life is all ruined."

"You do not deserve happiness," said Silvia. "Your life is no more valuable than the one your cruelty has destroyed. If you were happy Heaven would not be just."

"But I am not alone in being what you call wicked," he said. "Why am I so severely punished?"

"Do not ask me questions that will be answered for you in another world," she said. "All that you can suffer will be as nothing in comparison with the anguish that brought Lady Ianthe to her death."

He turned, shuddering, away; but she saw him take the ring and slip it on his finger: then she rose from her seat.

"I must go now," she said. "I shall be wanted. I came, Mr. Raymond, to tell you how strictly your cowardly wish shall be carried out—that the secret shall be most faithfully kept. Lady Ianthe made me take last night the most solemn oath that she could devise that I would never betray it, and I never will."

She could not help seeing the cowardly relief in his face.

"Do you know what she did with my letters?" he asked.

"No; but you may rely upon one thing: she who was so careful over the secret has left no trace of it. Your letters are destroyed, you may take my word for it; but, to make doubly sure, I will look myself. Your ring is here. Your secret is safe. No one will ever know how Lady Ianthe loved or how she died."

He looked somewhat ashamed.

"Mrs. Rymer," he said, "did *you* read my letter?"

"Yes—I read it; and if I thought any good result could follow, I would tell you what I thought of it; but all reproach, all recrimination is vain."

"Thank you for sparing me," he said humbly.

"Do not thank me. If I could do poor Lady Ianthe the least good, I would pursue you until death ; but I cannot, and for her sake your secret will remain untold. I have no more to say. I can only hope that in this world we may never meet again. I have no respect or liking for you."

With those words she left him, and it may be surmised that his reflections were not of the most agreeable kind. Silvia hastened to Dale House—she had not been missed ; the earl was still with his unhappy wife ; the servants still in confusion. Outside the house several people had congregated. Rumors of the terrible tragedy had spread.

The beautiful Lady Ianthe Leeson, one of the belles of the season, one of the loveliest girls in London, had accidentally poisoned herself—had taken an overdose of some medicine that contained strong poison.

At first people were incredulous. "It was impossible ; it must be a false rumor ; it could not be true ; Lady Ianthe dead ! Lady Ianthe poisoned ! who could credit it ?" Carriage after carriage dashed up to the door. One inquiry after another poured in, but Lord Leeson saw no one. All visitors were referred to Mrs. Rymer.

She had but one formula. "Lady Ianthe had unfortunately taken an overdose of medicine that contained a strong solution of prussic acid. She, either not knowing or not understanding the strength of it, had taken too much." No one doubted the story. So young, so beautiful, so highly gifted, sought in marriage, as every one knew she was, by one of the wealthiest peers in England, it was absurd to imagine anything wrong ; indeed, the idea did not occur to anyone. Sympathy, pity, condolences were lavished upon the unhappy family, but no one even hinted or suspected there was anything wrong.

When she could spare time, Silvia hastened to the room where all that was mortal of poor Lady Ianthe lay. She looked in the drawers, the desks, in every possible receptacle, but there was no sign of any letters.

"She destroyed them," thought Silvia; "few secrets have been better kept than hers."

Looking around, she found what she had not seen before—a note, addressed to Lord Monford. Would that contain a revelation of the secret or not? She held it in her hands. If in it the secret should be told, what despair and anguish would it not cause.

Still, she must deliver it. She took it to Lord Leeson, and told him she wanted to see him particularly. His haggard face almost frightened her.

"What do you want, Mrs. Rymer?" he asked, despairingly.

"I found this in Lady Ianthe's room, my lord, and I thought it my duty to bring it to you."

He took it from her hand, and read the address.

"To Lord Monford," he said. "If Lord Monford calls I will see him."

The words seemed to be almost prophetic. Silvia had not left him many minutes, before a message was brought, saying that Lord Monford wished to see her at once in the library. When she went in, her whole heart yearned to him, his face was so sad, and so full of untold anguish.

"Mrs. Rymer," he said, in a broken voice, "I hardly dare to ask you if this awful news is true."

"Yes," she replied; "there is no use disguising one word of the truth."

"I have only just heard it," he continued; "and I think it will kill me. Only God knew how I loved her. Will you tell me how it happened?"

Keep the secret, Silvia, keep it still ; if the man who loved her knew it, he would slay the man who betrayed her in her terrible need, and left her without the frailest plank between herself and the dark waters of ruin that engulfed her.

Once more she went through the story. Lord Monford listened without comment. Looking up at him, suddenly, she read *disbelief* in his face.

"The earl wished to see you," she said simply. "Shall I tell him you are here?"

There was something touching in the silent grasp of the hand with which the two gentlemen met.

"You have heard?" said the earl, and he made no effort to disguise the tears.

"I have heard," was the grave reply ; "but I cannot believe it yet. I am too shocked, too horrified even to be able to think clearly. I left her quite well last night, and now they tell me she is dead."

"I can hardly realize it myself," said the earl, "though I know it to be true. Lord Monford, this was found in my daughter's room. Will you read it?"

Lord Monford took the note, opened it, and read it.

"Who told your daughter of the money transactions between us?" he asked sadly.

"Lady Leeson in the first instance—I mentioned them in the second."

"Perhaps it was only natural that you should do so. I hope, however, that it would not have influenced her. I do not quite understand the tone of her letter."

Lord Monford gave it to the earl, who read it.

"My dear Lord Monford," it ran, "I have only lately become aware of the money debt under which my dear father, the earl, lies to you. I have known nothing of his money

troubles, and I regret it now. Life has only seemed to me like a pleasant dream ; this is one of the stern realities I have never known. My lord, you have done me a great honor to say that you love me. For that love's sake I appeal to you. Be kind and generous to my dear father. I do not understand money matters, but my mother tells me if he were not compelled to pay this money at once, he would, in a few years' time, retrieve his position. My lord, you say you love me—grant me the first favor I have ever asked from you—a grace that I solicit on my knees—*do not call this money in until my father is ready to pay it.* I have looked so often at your face lately ; it is a kindly one : you can be generous ; be generous to me. I urge my prayer upon you. I send it with you ; wherever you may go I bid it follow you ; and I have a firm hope, a sure conviction, that you will grant it."

Lord Leeson read the note through, then it fell from his hands to the floor.

"My darling !" he cried, "my dear, lost darling ! I did not think she troubled so deeply over my misfortunes."

"Did she speak much of them ?" asked Lord Monford.

"No ; even though I explained them to her, I had an idea that she did not understand them. She had never once, during her whole life, heard the word trouble mentioned."

CHAPTER XLV.

A GENEROUS ACT.

LORD MONFORD took up the letter and read it again. "There are two ways of looking at this letter," he said. "Either your daughter loved me, and wanted this

promise from me, this money affair settled before anything was said of love or marriage, or——”

He stopped short for a moment, and looked at the paper again. “Or,” he continued, “she did not love me, and she has sooner embraced death than consent to be my wife. Which is it, Lord Leeson?”

“I cannot tell you, indeed; you know quite as much of the affair as I do.”

“But you know whether she looked upon my proposal favorably or not,” said Lord Monford.

Now the earl had certainly loved his daughter very dearly—no one more so; he was overwhelmed with grief at losing her, yet, through all his love and all his sorrow, he retained a keen instinct of his worldly interests. He was a gentleman, and would not speak falsely; at the same time he feared to compromise his interests.

“Why should she object to such an offer as yours?” he said. “You would have made her a good husband. You would have given her wealth, position—all that a woman wants or values; why, then, should she object?”

“I cannot tell,” he replied sadly. “Women are riddles.”

“Even had she objected,” continued the earl, “she most surely would have said so; we have been very kind, indulgent parents to her. There was no attempt to force her inclinations. If she objected she had but to say so, and we should have complied with any wish she expressed. It would be absurd even to imagine that she would *kill* herself rather than be your wife. No alternative of any kind was placed before her.”

“I am glad of that,” said Lord Monford. “It was left, then, to her own free choice whether she married me or not?”

"My Lord Monford," replied the earl, "my daughter's choice could but be free. Dismiss all thoughts of anything else from your mind."

"Was she in the habit of taking this medicine?" he asked.

"I suppose so. The doctors say it is an accident that might have happened to any one. I do not understand why you take this morbid view of the case."

"I cannot quite explain, even to myself," said Lord Monford. "I am haunted by a melancholy idea that if I had never made Lady Ianthe an offer of marriage she would be living still."

Lord Leeson raised his white face with an expression of heartfelt anguish.

"Do you think so? I cannot see it; but if that suspicion should have even the least germ of truth in it, I join you in saying that the hour in which those proposals were made was the most unfortunate in my life or yours. She was my only child, and I loved her most dearly."

Lord Monford stood with the letter in his hands.

"People say," he said suddenly, "that I am a mercenary man—that I love money; it cannot be true, for I would give all my wealth twice over, if such a thing could be, to restore this fair young life."

He spoke so earnestly, so sadly, that the earl felt every word was true. Lord Monford turned away with a long, deep sigh.

"The word *money* shall never be mentioned between us again," he said. "You are my debtor, it is true, to a large amount, and, perhaps, I *was* mercenary and cruel to think of making your indebtedness to me a reason why you should influence your daughter's love in my behalf. But I am punished for my sin, and the punishment is almost heavier than I

can bear. Let it end here, Lord Leeson; I am not in want of the money. I shall give orders that it remain where it is, and, while I live, the payment of the interest will suffice; after my death—however, I will say no more; but there shall remain between us this understanding—that the repayment of that money shall never cost you one anxious moment.”

The earl grasped Lord Monford by the hand.

“You are magnificently generous, my lord,” he cried.

An expression of deep pain came over Lord Monford’s face.

“Nay, I am not generous,” he said; “if I had been, I should never have done as I did—made my love and my money one. I am anything but generous in this case. I am simply just. I asked for her love in payment, and she has given her life. I shall never divest myself of that idea.”

“It is even more painful to me than to you,” said the earl; and then Lord Monford rose, to intimate that the interview was over.

“I shall go abroad,” he said, abruptly. “England, and London above all, will be most hateful to me. Perhaps, when I return, I may see you again.”

The earl felt relieved. He would hardly have cared himself to have met the man, whom he honestly believed, say what he would, to be accountable for his daughter’s death. He murmured some few words about the countess, but Lord Monford interrupted him.

“Give to the countess,” he said, “my sympathy; use words warm and kindly as you will, they will not express my meaning too kindly; my whole heart aches for Lady Leeson, in this her terrible loss.”

And then Lord Monford went away. If he had only acted a few short weeks ago generously as he acted now, there would have been one great crime saved.

Neither Lord nor Lady Leeson kept up any appearance of reserve before Mrs. Rymer now—they spoke before her openly on all matters; she seemed almost to have taken the dead daughter's place. What they would have done without her in that house of mourning, no one could tell. She was a gleam of sunshine, a ray of hope, an angel of consolation. She alone could control Lady Leeson when the intensity of her despair mastered her. She alone could utter a few words of comfort that brought something like ease and rest to the sorely-aching heart. She alone could speak of the beautiful dead girl in such terms, that even while her words caused the mother's tears to flow afresh, they brought some little solace to the burning pain that seemed to eat away life itself. She heard Lord Leeson relate to his wife the conversation he had just had with Lord Monford. Her heart ached as she listened; it seemed to her that this was exactly what she had imagined of him. Oh! if Lady Ianthe would but have appealed first to his generosity.

Yet, even then she would not have been saved. It was not because Lord Monford wished to marry her that she had died. It was her lover's perfidy that had killed her, and of this perfidy no living creature knew the secret except herself.

"Silvia, Silvia!" cried Lady Leeson, in her agony of despair, "you know all about it. Tell me, do you think it was through my importunity, my prayers, and my persuasions that my darling died?"

Silvia went to her; she tried to raise the crouching figure; she took the cold hands in hers.

"Will you believe me?" she said. "Lady Leeson, will you believe that you have no reason to blame yourself, no cause for remorse? and I, who value truth so highly, would not say this to you if it were not true."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A WOMAN'S REFLECTIONS.

FASHIONABLE London had never been more shocked, more horrified ; it positively grew serious, and, for a few minutes at least, thought of a better world. To die so young, so beautiful, so beloved, with the fairest of prospects opening to her, with the world at her feet, with every bright and fair gift of life lavished upon her—it seemed too terrible.

Only twenty-four hours since, and she had been seen in their midst, her lovely face wreathed in smiles, lovers hanging on every word, radiant, bright, peerless, and now she had gone from among them forever ! It seemed almost impossible to realize the fact that the face of the beautiful Lady Ianthe would shine in their midst no more—that the graceful figure lay still and shrouded in death. Fair-faced girls grew grave and silent as they thought of it ; even those who discuss everything lightly, and have little reverence for anything sacred or holy, talked of this tragedy with sorrow that was expressed both in looks and words. Men of the world deplored the loss of a young and lovely woman ; women of the world, with pale, scared faces, remembered how death was, after all, busy in their midst, and that nothing could save them from his clutches.

Of the real truth, not one syllable was ever rumored ; the poor girl's secret was most faithfully kept. Of the hundreds that had admired her, who had sought her smiles and boasted proudly of one word from her, there was not one who suspected that she—beautiful as a goddess, proud as a queen—was the wife of a man who discarded her, who had asked her

to let their secret marriage remain a profound and shameful secret from all the world !

No one would have believed such a story had it been told ; it would have been laughed at as the most foolish of rumors. As for the word *suicide*, no one ever dreamed of it in connection with one so young and so beautiful as the Lady Ianthe.

There was no denying that the death of the earl's fair daughter had thrown a gloom over the season. Royal lips spoke words of kindest sympathy to the bereaved parents—words full of kindly, courtly grace and winning sweetness. It was all so sad—to die so young, in such a fashion, so terribly sudden, without, it was supposed, time to breathe a prayer ; and the same accident might overtake any one of them ! Grave-faced matrons said it was really a warning against taking those strong poisonous medicines—they might be very efficacious, but then an accident was so fatal ! The most annoying part of the business, to one who studied human nature, was, that while every one found a moral and a warning, that moral and warning was sure to fit some one else, and not themselves !

Of the passionate love and passionate sorrow, of the scorching shame and burning anguish, of the blight that had fallen over the fair young life, and had withered it as a breath of poison destroys a fair flower, who knew, who could say one word ? The sweet, sad tragedy, the happy love-dream that had begun so sweetly and had ended so tragically ! Has every life such secrets ? You who smile, and sing, and dance, have you a tragedy bitter as scorn, cruel as death ? Have your eyes wept burning tears, and your heart broken slowly with its burden of intolerable pain ?

“ O life ! ” cries the poet, “ is this *all* thy song—endure and die ? ”

The bright, sunny morning came when the mournful procession was to start for Leesdale. The earl and the countess could not endure the thought of burying their daughter in London ; the beautiful body must be taken to the stately home where the Leesons for long generations had slept.

“She is the last of our race,” said they, one to another, “and great honors shall be paid to her.”

She was not to sleep in the dark vault where earls and countesses without number slept ; but out in the green, sunny park, where the sweet winds of Heaven blew freely, where the birds sang and the flowers bloomed, an exquisite white marble mausoleum was raised, and the fairest of the Leesons slept therein.

No one will ever forget that funeral who saw it. If sunshine, music, and perfume could have robbed death of its bitterness, there would have been but little left, for the sun had never been more bright or earth more fair.

When it was over, and the unhappy countess was shut up in her room—the earl had locked the door of his study, requesting that he might not be disturbed—when the quiet of recent death and funeral gloom still lay over the sunlit house, Silvia went out in the park alone. It seemed so long since the luxury of solitude had been hers ; her eyes were filled with the haunting memory of sad faces ; the whispers of the wind seemed to mingle with the sighs and lamentations that of late had surrounded her. She walked on through the broad glades of tall trees, where the sunlight danced on the grass, and the deer bent their stately heads to the clear pools to drink. The flowers were full of fragrance ; they seemed to greet her with odorous breath. She sat down and rested her head against the tall, rugged stem of a slender birch, while she indulged in the luxury of silent thought.

How long it was since a gleam of sunshine and fragrance of flowers had wooed her ; how long since she had walked in those green lanes and clover meadows, listening to the love story that had changed all the world for her ! What had she not seen and heard since then ? What cruel lessons had not life taught her ? Was there any true love, any manly faith, any manly honor ? Sitting there in the sunshine she doubted all and everything, except the mercy and goodness of Heaven.

She saw greed and mercenary motives where at least she would have expected the simplicity of honor. She saw self-interest where she would have looked for love ; she saw deceit and treachery where there should have been good faith and affection. She saw even red-handed murder lurking between flowers, and, raising her hands and her eyes with a passionate cry to Heaven, she wept more bitterly than she had wept before.

“ There is nothing true,” she said. “ When I was younger, I believed in everything, and in every one ; now life has taught me that I must not believe, and I would that I had died before I lost my faith.”

She wondered whether retribution overtook the wrongdoer. She thought of Mr. Thornton, whose cruelty had broken his wife's heart. Her wealth enriched him ; life held nothing but pleasure for him. He had married that gentle, hapless lady solely for her money, and, having secured it, he had slowly, deliberately, and willfully tortured her to death—not by poison or blows, but by the slow aid of cruelty and neglect, he had sinned his sin. Would he now reap his reward ? Was he, with her money, to marry the beautiful woman he loved, and pass the remainder of his days happy as a poet in a dream ?

Her face flushed at the thought. She did not remember

that even the wisest of men sees but a short distance before him, and that the future is known only to the great and most wise God. She did not know that, sooner or later, retribution overtakes every one; every single crime is punished, every wrong redressed, let men say or think blindly what they will.

How would it be with Clifford Raymond—he who had courted this beautiful wild-flower, who had grasped it at any cost, and then, fearing the penalty he must pay for gathering it, had flung it away? The girl he had sacrificed to his love had died with shame and anguish. How would it fare with him?

His secret would be safe, undoubtedly, quite safe; nothing could ever betray it, or cause it to be betrayed. Would honor and fame be his—wealth, ease, and competence; perhaps, in the years to come, the love of women and children? *Could it be so?*

Again her face flushed and her eyes flashed with indignation; again she forgot that although man sees the beginning, God alone sees the end.

What of her own love—the man she had worshiped so truly, the man to whom she had given the whole of her heart; who had deceived her more cruelly than ever woman was deceived—what of him?

Somewhere in this bright world he was living, prosperous and happy; perhaps beloved by some one fairer, better-born than herself. *He* had suffered nothing for his sin—never would suffer; for even if it should be known in the world, people would but smile, the follies of young men are so leniently treated. What is a woman's broken heart, ruined life, blighted name? They only resemble the scalps that Indian braves hang at their girdles—the more of these the merrier.

“Is there one law for women,” thought the girl, “and

another for men? Is a man's sin to be smiled at, glossed over, made little of, excused in every way, while a woman, for the same sin, must forfeit everything she holds dear on earth, and meet with nothing but scorn and contempt?"

No; men may think it is so, but the grand, immutable laws of God were made for soul, and not for sex.

Silvia Rymer was to have one answer to all her problems yet.

CHAPTER XLVII.

IN A NEW HOME.

THE earl and countess decided upon remaining during the summer at Leedale Park. Lady Leeson said to herself that she never cared about seeing London again. She did not know how much of her life had been bound up in that of her daughter. She was fearfully changed. The stately figure looked as though long and sorrowful years had taken away its comely, matronly beauty. A terrible blight had passed over her; her face was drawn and haggard, deep lines were on the once smooth brow and round the silent lips; life was over for the once brilliant Countess of Leeson. Money troubles had ceased to grieve her; but the wealth of the whole world would have given her but little pleasure now that the beautiful daughter, for whom she had coveted it, was no longer here to enjoy it.

They remained at the Park in the loneliest seclusion, seeing no one, admitting no visitors, rarely going beyond the grounds; and Silvia saw with sorrow that the earl's stately head drooped lower and lower each day. She saw that his hair grew gray, that he seemed to have forgotten how to smile, and her heart ached with great pity for him.

She did her best to cheer and amuse him, but his sorrow lay too deep for healing. She was useful, too, in a hundred different ways, to the countess. So the summer passed, but its flowers and its beauty brought no healing.

It was when the winter months were coming that the countess, with a mournful smile, told Silvia she had something important to say to her.

"You have been very devoted to us," said Lady Leeson, looking up into the beautiful face. "Had you been our own child you could scarcely have done more for us. Oh! what am I saying? *She* died for us!" and the pent-up agony of silent weeks seemed to break forth in the words. "She died for us," repeated the unhappy mother; "my beautiful darling, who should have been a queen. But, Silvia, this is what I wanted to say to you: you have been a most faithful friend to us; but my lord and myself both think a change is needful for you, as well as for us. You are too young to bury yourself in such mournful seclusion as ours."

"I ask nothing better than to share it," replied Silvia, raising her eyes, bright with tears, to Lady Leeson's face.

"That I believe," said the countess; "but it must not be, Silvia. There will be no happiness for us; death has taken from us our all. We shall live our appointed time, but into our lives no ray of happiness or light will come. Lord Leeson wants very much to go abroad. Do you notice that every day he grows thinner and paler—more haggard, and more worn? I, too, think change of scene will be good for him; and of course I must go with him. I shall not go until you have found a happier home than this."

Silvia looked as she felt—grieved.

"It seems very sudden," she murmured.

"Yes, it *is* sudden. My husband is not one to complain;

but I think he has borne as much as he can. Evidently his courage and patience have come to an end. He told me this morning he must go, or he must die."

"In that case there is not another word to be said," replied Silvia. "You should go at once; Lord Leeson is not one who speaks in vain."

"I have heard of something that I believe and hope will suit you," continued Lady Leeson. "While you were in London did you ever hear of Mrs. Greville?"

Silvia repeated the name.

"Mrs. Greville?" she said; "no, I do not remember; but then I know so few people, and have heard so few names. I do not certainly remember that one."

"Mrs. Greville is a distant relative of mine," continued the countess; "*very* distant, something like eighth or ninth cousin; still, we have always kept up a correspondence. She is quite twenty years younger than I am. She is a widow, young, and the world says beautiful—I say flighty; very rich. She was only eighteen when she married Mr. Greville for his money; she was very pretty then, and he was considered the wealthiest commoner in England."

"Mr. Greville did not live very long after his marriage, and he left the whole of his immense property to her; but, Mrs. Rymer, I must prepare you. She is strange; she is not like any one you have ever known, I am sure. She has the habit of speaking so strangely—she always had, even as a child—and no one, I should imagine, has ever corrected her."

"Is that her worst fault?" asked Silvia.

"It is a very bad one, my dear, if you take into consideration how censorious the world is. Do not misunderstand me: I have never heard one syllable against Mrs. Greville in all my

life. She speaks strangely, strongly, frankly—in fact, she says what others think and refrain from saying.”

Silvia smiled.

“I do not think that is a trait in her character that I shall dislike at all,” she said. “Is it possible for any one to be too truthful?”

Lady Leeson looked thoughtful.

“No,” she replied, “it is not, as you say, possible to love truth too well; but the question is whether it is wise to drag truth in by the head and shoulders, as Mrs. Greville does, on all occasions, without the least heed to the why or the wherefore, or the fitness of time and place.”

“That may not always be advisable, certainly,” replied Silvia.

“No,” said Lady Leeson. “It seems to me that education and refinement are the only true guides as to what to say or when to say it. To return to Mrs. Greville. She has been living with an elderly cousin, who has acted as chaperon. She wrote to me yesterday telling me this cousin was dead and buried, and asking, at the same time, if I could recommend her some lady to live with her. I think it would be very nice for you. Mrs. Greville is young, lively, fond of society; and you would forget some of the horrors that have overwhelmed you here. Shall I write and tell Mrs. Greville that you are inclined to take the engagement?”

“I do not like leaving you,” said Silvia, earnestly.

“Nor do I like to part with you,” said the countess; “but Lord Leeson will recover more quickly alone, I think.”

So in a few days it was arranged that Silvia should leave Leedale and go to Lingholme Hall, the residence of Mrs. Greville. It was not without bitter sorrow that she parted from Lord and Lady Leeson. Her life seemed to be one continued

change. She, who had thought herself once so far removed from all change ; who had thought herself safe in the haven of a husband's love, safe in the shelter of her own home ; who had believed herself at rest forever from the world's storms—now to find that every year brought with it new faces, new friends, new associations.

“Verily,” she thought, “I am thrown on the world.”

As the train sped through the pleasant counties, a dull kind of wonder came over her. Would life be all like this ? Would it be all change, all variety, or would there come to her a day when she could rest under the shelter of her own home ? But of all the thoughts, of all the wonder that came to her, no dream so wild or so weird as the truth overshadowed her.

Lingholme Park was on the borders of the eastern seas, and Silvia found the journey long and tiresome. It was dark in the evening when she arrived, and her spirits sank as they never had done before. She would have given much for the sight of a familiar face, or the sound of a familiar voice. There was a carriage at the station to meet her, and she was driven through what seemed to her miles of beautiful undulating woodlands. The park was most extensive, but as the gray shades of evening lay over it, she could hardly tell what it was like. The carriage stopped before the stately entrance of a large mansion ; it was built of gray stone, and looked more like a palace than a country house.

It was brilliantly illuminated ; almost every window was bright with light. Silvia looked up in alarm.

“Is there a party to-night ?” she asked of the footman who opened the carriage door.

The man smiled as he touched his cap.

“No,” he replied, “there is no party ; but my mistress

likes plenty of light. She does not like any room to be in darkness."

"What a singular taste," thought Silvia, and yet it seemed to her that in some respects that was a true key to the lady's character.

She was shown into a magnificent entrance hall. Everything gave promise of the most boundless wealth and luxury. Almost confused at first, she thought that by mistake she must have been brought to one of the royal palaces of a great queen.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A WARM WELCOME.

A COMELY, pleasant-looking maid came to greet Silvia. "Mrs. Rymer," she said, "my lady thought you would reach here about this time. Would you like to go to your rooms? They are ready for you."

Silvia followed her guide up the magnificent staircase, with its marble steps and rich crimson carpeting. Such gems of art as were strewn in that one short journey! such statues! Venus the beautiful, Hercules the strong, Apollo the god-like, intermixed with stands of rarest flowers, and pictures of priceless value. She was by this time quite accustomed to the luxury of great houses; but she had never seen anything like such wealth—such a display of magnificence as this, in her life.

In the second corridôr they came to a door which opened into a small passage, disclosing the doors of two other apartments.

"My lady thought you would like both your rooms to-

gether, and not very far from hers," said the smiling maid.

Then she threw open the door of a pretty little sitting-room, furnished with great taste and elegance. A bright fire was burning, a lamp stood ready lighted on the table, the odor of flowers greeted her like a pleasant message; on the table stood a pretty tea service, all ready for use. There was such a look of home and comfort that Silvia's heart grew lighter. Some one who understood comfort had evidently been in the room to see that all was right for her, for on the table lay books, magazines, and periodicals.

Then the maid opened the next door, and Silvia saw a beautiful little chamber, white, fresh, fragrant.

"I will unpack your boxes," said the girl, "while you take some tea, Mrs. Rymer."

"Shall I see Mrs. Greville this evening?" asked Silvia.

"I think so. Some visitors came quite unexpectedly to dinner, or my lady would have been here to welcome you herself. She wished me to say so."

"She is very kind!" said Silvia, gratefully, and the girl's face flushed warmly.

"Kind!" repeated the girl—"my mistress is an angel!" and Silvia liked her none the less for the warmth of the expression.

Then came a rest after the toil of the journey. It seemed to Silvia that she was in fairy-land. All the gloom that had made Leesdale Park so melancholy, had disappeared. Here were the bright light, the warmth, the fragrance, the elegantly appointed table, the amusing books.

"My lines have fallen in pleasant places," thought the young girl; and then she began to wonder what would happen in this place—whether tragedy or farce, whether sorrow or joy,

happiness or misery. She was thinking so deeply as to be hardly conscious, when a rap at the door aroused her.

"May I come in?" asked a voice, clear and sweet as the chime of a silver bell, and the next moment Silvia was owing to herself that in all her life she had seen nothing so sparkling, so bright, so exquisite as Mrs. Greville.

A sudden, sweet, subtle perfume filled the room; it was followed by the sound of rustling silk. Looking up hastily, Silvia saw a lady rather under than over the medium size, the loveliest, most graceful figure—*petite*, sparkling, radiant. Rich robes of black and white silk, trimmed with silver flowers and leaves, fell around her in graceful folds. The face was dark and bright, with something half-foreign in its flashing, brilliant beauty; the eyes large, liquid, bright, and black as night; the eyebrows slightly arched; the lips ripe, red, and beautiful.

At first sight Silvia could not read the expression of that face. Was it mirthful, mischievous, scornful, or what? She could not at first determine. But the smile was very sweet and winning, the voice most marvelously musical and clear.

"I have hurried from my visitors," said Mrs. Greville, with a smile, "to bid you welcome to Lingholme."

"You are very kind," said Silvia. Then she grew somewhat confused at finding those dark eyes, full of half-mirthful humor, fixed upon her.

"You are very young, Mrs. Rymer, to be my chaperon. I should fancy that I have the advantage in years."

"Life does not seem to me to be altogether measured by time," replied Silvia. "I have seen people old at twenty, young at forty."

"That is true," said Mrs. Greville, more thoughtfully.

"Are you a philosopher, Mrs. Rymer?"

"I have learned some hard lessons," she replied.

"You must try to forget them now," said Mrs. Greville, with a bright smile; "*my* creed is that life is meant to be one happy dream. I do not believe either in philosophy or anything else that makes people dull."

"But what of real pain or real distress!" asked Silvia, somewhat startled by this novel doctrine.

"I do not believe in the need for it," replied the beautiful lady, with a gay laugh; "half the people of this world make their own misery and pain."

"But what of poverty and sickness," asked Silvia, still more amazed.

"Those are horrors, and I do not think we need make ourselves miserable by thinking of them," said Mrs. Greville, with another gay little laugh. "I hope you found your rooms comfortable and everything to your taste?"

"I thought I had suddenly fallen into fairy-land," said Silvia.

"That is right. I love to see people comfortable and happy. Shall you like being my chaperon?"

Silvia looked up at the bright face with a smile of hesitation. "My only fear," she replied, "is that I shall not be of much use to you."

"Yes, you will. I do not pretend that I shall obey, or anything of that kind. I have done just as I liked all my life, and shall do the same until I die. I cannot see what life would be without freedom. However, I cannot stay to discuss these questions with you now, Mrs. Rymer; I must return to my visitors. I think it is the first time in my life that I ever found visitors tiresome."

Silvia looked at her in wonder. The bright, unshadowed face did not seem as though she had ever found anything troublesome. She held out to Silvia a white hand shining with jewels.

“Welcome to Lingholme, Mrs. Rymer,” she said ; “may it be your home for many happy years. And now good night. Try to make yourself very happy and comfortable. We shall know each other better in a few days.”

And for some minutes after she had gone Silvia stood in wondering amaze at the brightness and the beauty of the vision so suddenly appearing. The sweet, subtle perfume seemed to linger in the room ; the sound of the laughing, musical voice seemed to linger in her ears. Then she sat down again, and began to ponder on the vanity of women—their characteristics.

How varied were those she had known ! Mrs. Thornton had clung to the shadow of an unworthy love ; she died because she could not live any longer without a love that Silvia knew well was not worth the acceptance of any woman—a weak, fragile, tender soul, out of which life had been crushed as one crushes the perfume from a flower ; a woman who only asked one gift from life, and that was love ; whose worship was abject ; who would have delighted in slavery ; who wished for nothing better or higher than to be the slave of the man whose neglect had killed her. That was one type of woman—not a common one, Silvia hoped. She would not have resented words and blows from her husband, if she could only have believed that he loved her.

Then there was Lady Ianthe—lofty, noble, full of poetry and romance ; believing that love in itself is the highest, the noblest, the greatest gift in life ; believing in it as in light from Heaven ; believing it so full of truth, of purity, of nobility, that when she found herself deceived, she could no longer endure the life that had been brightened by love ; it became so odious to her that she could no longer bear it, but laid it down even at the price or risk of her own soul. That

was another type of woman, one of the most noble and fatally mistaken ; a woman who could not brook perfidy, who could not endure to find life less noble than she had believed it to be.

Now another type was presented to her : the light, careless, happy, laughing woman of the world, who refused to believe either in pain, sorrow, or suffering ; whose life had resembled that of a bright butterfly on the wing.

“And I am another type myself,” said Silvia, with a smile ; “but I am half afraid there is nothing noble about me. My sorrow was bitter enough and hard enough to have killed me ; but I have done battle with it, and am living it down. What type of a woman am I ?”

She was to find an answer to that question in the years to come, and in the mean time she pondered over it.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A JOURNEY IN PROSPECT.

IT was not long before Mrs. Rymer felt quite at home in Lingholme. Her duties as chaperon, or lady's attendant, were not onerous. They consisted chiefly in looking amiable and listening to Mrs. Greville. She was required to be in the drawing-room when visitors came to dine with Mrs. Greville ; to answer any letters that the beautiful young widow felt disinclined to answer herself ; to go out with her to dinners, balls, and parties.

“In short,” she said one day to herself, “it seems to me that I am most magnificently paid for amusing myself in every possible way.”

Rather a novel way of looking at her duties, that had not, perhaps, occurred to a chaperon.

She was sitting one afternoon with Mrs. Greville, when the conversation turned upon faces.

"I love beautiful faces," said the mistress of Lingholme. "I am sure it is a fortunate thing for me that I am not a man. I should have been in love with every pretty face I came near."

"And constant to none," said Silvia.

"Certainly not. Did you ever hear of a butterfly who spent its whole existence in the heart of a rose? It loves every fair flower, sips the dew from every crimson leaf, enjoys every fragrant blossom."

"You are not speaking seriously!" said Silvia.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Greville, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"Because I do not think *any* woman could reasonably advocate inconstancy," replied the young girl.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Greville, "I am not advocating inconstancy. I never advocate anything; it is too much trouble. I simply say what I should do if I had been born a butterfly or a man."

"I think most men are inconstant enough," said Silvia. "I do not remember to have met many who boasted of great fidelity as a virtue."

Mrs. Greville laughed.

"There is a great deal of the butterfly in most men," she said; "but we were speaking of beautiful faces. I have made a collection of them—that is, of photographs of them. Would you like to see them?"

"Very much," said Silvia; and Mrs. Greville rose.

With the graceful, gliding motion so peculiar to her, she went to one of the side tables and returned with an album, richly bound in crimson and gold.

“I have the portraits of some of the loveliest women in England here,” she said. “If I were a flatterer, I should say that yours deserved a place among the number.”

“Mine!” said Silvia, looking up with a startled glance.

Mrs. Greville laughed.

“Yes, yours,” she said. “Do you not know that your face is extremely beautiful?”

“I had forgotten it, if ever I knew it,” replied Silvia; and there came a shadow so sad in the depths of her beautiful eyes that Mrs. Greville was startled.

“When a woman forgets her own beauty, there has been some grave sorrow busy at her heart,” she thought. But one peculiarity of hers was that she seldom, if ever, gave expression to a grave thought.

“A little flattery, in that case, will not hurt you,” she said to Silvia; “and there will be no harm in my telling you that I have no face in my book more beautiful than your own.”

“Yet,” thought Silvia, wearily, “what has my beauty done for me? Only helped to break my heart and blight my life. If my face had not been fair, he would not have cared for me, and I might have been happy.” While Mrs. Greville, at her side, thought—

“Ah, my lovely chaperon has had her romance, and it has not been a pleasant one.”

Then, sitting side by side, they examined the faces in the album. They came to one over which Silvia hung enraptured, not entirely for its beauty, but for the nobility of expression—the soul that seemed to shine through the face.

“You admire that?” said Mrs. Greville.

“I do indeed,” she replied, “and yet——”

“Yet, what? do not hesitate. What were you going to say?”

"Perhaps it may be indiscreet to express my thoughts, but I was suddenly impressed with the idea that this was not the face of a very happy woman."

Mrs. Greville's attention seemed suddenly and hastily arrested.

"What makes you think so," she asked eagerly.

"I can hardly tell you why. All people take fancies at times. There seems to me a story in that face. I could fancy the owner of it having to pass through some terrible sorrow—having a dark future and an uncommon fate."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Greville. "That is Lady Clotilde Dynecourt. I know but little of her; but her husband was once a great friend of mine. I have always liked him and admired him exceedingly. I should not like to think there was any fate but a bright one in store for his wife."

"Some faces tell their own story," said Silvia, sadly. "This is the face of a noble woman, who will look for nobility in those she loves; and, looking, not find it."

"Why, you are more cynical than I am myself," cried Mrs. Greville. "Even I do not despair of finding some nobility in poor human nature. I shall watch Lady Clotilde's career with interest, just to see if your prophecy be a true one."

Silvia repeated the name slowly.

"Lady Clotilde Dynecourt. Is she an English lady?"

"Yes; she was Lady Clotilde Voyse before her marriage. Lord Dynecourt is a most charming man. I remember that I envied her when I heard that she had married him."

Silvia smiled.

"That is another of your terribly frank speeches, Mrs. Greville," she said. "That is an idea that might have occurred to many women, but few would have cared to express it."

More than once that evening she returned to look at the face that for her had so strange a charm.

How little she dreamed that the features she thought so noble, so full of soul, so eloquent, belonged to the woman that of all the world she had the greatest cause to dread, to pity, and to dislike !

How little she dreamed that Lady Clotilde Dynecourt was her rival—had taken her place in the heart of the only man she had ever loved !

How little she dreamed that the time was coming when they two should stand arrayed against each other !

A sudden whim came to Mrs. Greville.

“I shall not pass the winter in England,” she said. “To tell the truth, an English winter is most detestable to me. I cannot support the fogs, the cold, the frost, and the desolation. Sunshine is the greatest blessing in all the world ; and when one can afford to go in search of it, why not have it ?”

“Where should you like to go ?” asked Silvia, anxiously.

“Anywhere where the sun shines, and the flowers bloom. Let us go to Italy.”

“Should you wish me to go with you ?”

“Certainly. Where are your ideas of propriety, my dear Mrs. Rymer. Am I to roam about the world without a companion ?”

“But,” said Silvia humbly, “I am afraid that I should be so utterly useless to you. I know nothing of traveling ; I can speak no language but my own. I am afraid that I should not be a pleasant companion.”

“I have no fear of the kind,” laughed Mrs. Greville. “As for languages, they are soon learned when one lives where they are spoken. If we stay away a year or two you will be a famous linguist. Then we will go through a complete course

of art education. We will visit all the famous pictures and statues in Europe. I have been educated several times, but I have unfortunately forgotten all I learned. There is no cause for delay—we will start at once.”

Silvia hesitated. There was the boy. She had been pining for long months for one look at him.

“What is it?” asked Mrs. Greville, in her frank, imperious manner. “I can see a doubt in your face. What is the doubt?”

“I should like to see my little son,” replied Silvia. “I should like to spend, at least, two or three days with him before going abroad.”

“By all means,” replied Mrs. Greville; “go to-morrow, if you will. I have never cared for children myself, but I can sympathize with those who do. If your boy were only a little older we would have him down at Lingholme. He is too young yet to pay visits. Go to-morrow, and stay as many days as you like with him; we will have everything ready to start at once when you return.”

So on the morrow Silvia went. It was the second holiday in her life, and though sorrow still preyed upon her, though her life lay in ruins, her love betrayed, her future blighted, not even her fair name left to her—she could not help feeling happier and better than she had done since her betrayer had left her.

The fresh air, the sense of freedom, and the happiness of seeing her child again, brought the most exquisite bloom to her lovely face. She looked so young, so beautiful, so attractive in her sweet, gentle grace, that she felt ashamed of the many admiring glances that followed her.

“If they knew,” she thought to herself—“if people only knew my story, how they would loathe me. It is well

for me that the true history of my life is not told in my face."

People might wonder why she shrank from observation, why she seemed inclined to hide from all notice ; but then how few could have guessed that the lovely face hid a tragedy.

CHAPTER L.

MOTHER AND SON.

IT was with joy that was almost pain that Silvia held the boy in her arms once more.

"My little Cyril!" she cried, in a rapture of delight. "Soon, so soon, you will be little no more."

For the child was growing into magnificent strength and beauty. The young mother trembled as she looked into the beautiful face, it was so like that of her lost love. Cyril had the same handsome eyes, but in his there was no indolence, only fire, energy, and power. He had the same beautiful lips, the broad, square brow, the clustering curls ; in fact, it would have been difficult to find a stronger likeness than existed between father and son.

Again and again Silvia looked at him, almost in terror. No one who had ever seen Alric Rymer could fail to recognize his son.

"Nature has told my secret," said the girl to herself. "The secret that I would have kept with my life she has told."

It was more than a year since she had seen the boy, and the difference in him bewildered her. He, too, was overjoyed. Nothing seemed to weaken his love for his beautiful young mother. It was as though he had parted from her yesterday.

He caressed her in his graceful, loving way ; kissed her face, her hands, murmuring the while sweetest words of tenderness to her.

“There is a balm for every wound,” thought Silvia ; “all my sorrows seem small while I have Cyril.”

Yet it was terribly hard when he smiled at her with his father’s eyes, kissed her with his father’s lips—when he spoke to her in that voice every tone of which she remembered so well. So closely did it resemble her lost love’s that there were times when she started and thought he must be near. He was growing up, this boy for whom she had dreamed such bright dreams, and for whom she had now no hope at all. What would his inheritance be ? That of shame and sorrow. He would have no name, no place in the world, no father’s love or protection.

“You will have no one but me, my darling,” she cried, clasping him in her arms. “And, oh ! how I will love you, to make up for this.”

She did not spend her whole time in caressing him. There were arrangements to be made for him. He was nearly three years old, and must not remain under good Mrs. Tate’s care much longer.

As she sat with him in her arms there came to her no warning of the future of that child—a future of which history still speaks.

At Hampstead there was an excellent school for boys, under the superintendence of a clergyman and his wife. The clergyman himself, a learned scholar and a good man, undertook the elder pupils, while his wife managed the younger. Silvia resolved upon going to the Rev. Mr. Hardman, and placing her son under his care. She told him her husband was dead, and she herself had an engagement out of England, which

might extend over many years. When Cyril was three she should like him to be taken entirely under the minister's care. Mr. Hardman looked earnestly at the beautiful face of the girl.

"I will undertake the charge," he said; "and I hope that your son may grow up like his mother."

Her face flushed with pleasure, but no compliments ever made her vain; she had always the sad afterthought:

"If they knew my story—if the world knew me for what I am, there would be no kind words for me then."

It was a great relief for her to know that such an excellent home and excellent training awaited Cyril. On the day following she took him to Hampstead House, and Mrs. Hardman was enchanted with the child's beauty. But the clergyman said little. He looked earnestly at the patrician face, he noted the air of high birth and breeding that seemed to pervade every action of the child.

"I have seen a face somewhere," he said, "that rises before me as I look at your little boy, Mrs. Rymer."

Silvia blushed, and then felt annoyed with herself for having done so.

"I must be more careful, for my boy's sake," she thought; "for myself nothing matters. On his life, if I can prevent it, there must rest no stain. I was innocent—I am innocent; why should I blush for another's sin?"

"I should like to understand plainly," said Mr. Hardman. "You may be absent for some years, and letters fail at times. What kind of training am I to give your son, is he to be a man of business, or what?"

She never could account for the impulse that made her answer:

"Let him have the training of a gentleman;" but in after years she was thankful for having said the words.

When Silvia had quitted the house, Mr. Hardman turned to his wife.

“Rymer!” he said, slowly; “I have no recollection of the name.”

“Nor have I,” said Mrs. Hardman; “but it is a good name, I am sure.”

“And I, my dear, have been accustomed to boys too long to make any mistake. I can read the signs of race as I can read the pages of a book, and I tell you that that boy has some of the best blood of England in his veins.”

Mrs. Hardman looked anxious.

“I hope it is all right,” she said.

“You may be quite sure of that. I would trust that young mother’s face sooner than any other face I’ve seen, except yours, my dear.”

The lady smiled. She was a woman of sense, not disposed to give way to foolish jealousy because her husband chose to admire a pretty face.

“Mrs. Rymer is a widow, I presume,” she said.

“Yes; and, unless I make a greater mistake than ever I thought myself capable of making, Mrs. Rymer’s husband was one of old England’s aristocrats—the boy looks as though he had had a peer for his father.”

Before Silvia had left Hampstead, she had made every arrangement. She was to pay the whole of her annuity for her boy, and he in return was to receive the best education, food, and clothing. The allowance was munificent; but she wanted no money for herself. It pleased her generous heart that she should give all to her boy; it seemed to her some kind of atonement for his father’s neglect.

That night, as she clasped him in her arms, she covered his beautiful face with kisses and tears.

"You have but me, my darling," she said, "in the whole wide world. Your father took from you even his name. I give you all I have in the world," and that thought seemed to comfort her. It was hard work to leave him, and the young mother shed bitter tears.

"You must not forget me, my darling," she said. "You must always remember mamma."

The child clung to her as though he understood what she meant.

"I shall love you always," he said, and the words comforted her.

Then she was obliged to return to Lingholme. There she found everything ready for immediate departure, and Mrs. Greville anxious for her return.

"I hope I have not been too long?" said Silvia.

"No; to speak truthfully, I did not expect you until tomorrow. I know what mothers are with their children. I see by your face that you have been weeping bitter tears. As soon as we return to Lingholme, he shall come and stay with us."

A promise that Mrs. Greville kept, and the keeping of which involved many lives in one common catastrophe.

Then they started for Italy, and for the next three years life was like a fairy dream to Mrs. Rymer. She had always longed to travel, and for the opportunity to study. Now she had both. They visited all the most famous cities in Italy, and Silvia made a point of rising early. While Mrs. Greville was dreaming away the pleasant morning hours, Silvia was busy with grammar and dictionary. It was not long before she could read Italian as well as English, and then she began to speak it, and, before Mrs. Greville thought it possible that she had mastered the rudiments, she was able to carry on an eloquent conversation. Mrs. Greville was much amused at her companion's industry.

“Are you qualifying yourself for a diploma?” she asked.

“No,” replied Silvia, simply; “but I should like to be clever, if I can, for the sake of my darling boy.”

And Mrs. Greville, who, despite her gayety and cynical philosophy, had something of a woman’s heart, was touched by the answer.

There is no education so useful as that acquired by travel and observation. Before Silvia Rymer had been long in Italy, she had made more progress in general knowledge, in art, in literature, in biography, than she could have made by quiet study at home for many years. It never occurred to her that she was qualifying herself to take a high position in the great world. Her only idea was that when her boy grew up, clever and accomplished, he must not be ashamed of her. She must do her best to make herself a companion to him. Mrs. Greville mixed in the highest circles. Silvia had always before her eyes the example of some of the best-bred men and women of modern Europe. No wonder she profited by it, and that day by day she gained grace, dignity, intelligence, and sweetness. Day by day her delicate beauty increased; she was universally admired, and the mistress of Lingholme professed herself delighted by the homage offered to her beautiful companion.

CHAPTER LI.

“BECAUSE I DO NOT LOVE HIM.”

FOUR years had passed since Silvia Rymer bade adieu to England and her little son. Seldom had time worked such wonders or produced such changes as in her. She had left home beautiful and graceful, it is true—gifted with a cer-

tain kind of tact that stood in the place of cultivation ; she returned one of the most elegant and accomplished women of her time.

What was ever so mighty as love ?—what love so great as that of a mother for her child ? Had little Cyril died, Silvia would have had no object in life—she would have been quite indifferent as to how that life was spent. As he lived, her whole mind and the strength of her whole soul was devoted to one object—making herself a fitting companion for him. He was to be a gentleman, this noble, princely, beautiful boy of hers, and she must be worthy of her place as his mother. For his sake she rose when others slept. She studied indefatigably ; she read, thought, and pondered. For his sake she grasped eagerly at all the knowledge it was possible to acquire ; for his sake she sought the conversation of wise and learned men ; for his sake she toiled through the rudiments of education, she read the choicest books, she devoted every spare moment to the acquirement of knowledge. Her opportunities were great. Mrs. Greville had no thought but to amuse herself. It was always late when she rose, and Silvia, by dint of perseverance in early hours, found that she had something like half-a-day at her own disposal.

The result of her continual and industrious application was something wonderful. When Lord Dyncourt first saw her she was a lovely, simple, graceful girl, something like a wild-flower untrained—ignorant, pure in heart and soul, but uncultivated and crude in her notions ; now she was one of the most refined and graceful of women. Her beautiful soul shone in her face. There was a grace and elegance in her words ; a sweet, subtle fancy seemed to dictate her bright thoughts. There were few subjects on which she could not converse with ease and fluency. In all matters connected

with art, poetry, and literature, she was quite at home. She had a method of expressing her thoughts, at once so simple and so graceful, that the most gifted and intellectual men found the greatest pleasure in talking with her. She spoke French and Italian with ease, she could read German ; she had more than a superficial acquaintance with modern literature. There was not a picture of any renown of which she did not know the history. She had always been beautiful, but the loveliness of her face deepened ; it no longer consisted merely of shape and color. The spiritual, clear expression was now perhaps the greatest charm.

In short, a more beautiful, refined, graceful woman than Silvia Rymer at this period of her life it would have been difficult to find.

Mrs. Greville watched the change with great delight. She was too carelessly generous, too large-hearted to either fear or dread any rivalry. Nothing pleased her more than to hear her beautiful attendant admired and complimented.

One thing, however, in Mrs. Rymer puzzled her. Why did she invariably refuse all offers of marriage ? Several had been made to her, some of them most brilliant ; one from a gentleman in Florence, whose wealth and position were unexceptionable ; but Silvia refused all with a quiet dignity that somewhat bewildered the gay widow.

“So you have refused Monsieur De Laune,” she said to Silvia. “Do you know that he will succeed to his father’s title and estates some future day ?”

Silvia smiled.

“Yes ; I ought to know it, for you have impressed the fact upon me every day since he first came here.”

“For your own good, Silvia. Why did you refuse him ?”

“For such a simple reason, that you will laugh when I tell you—because I do not love him.”

“Love !” repeated Mrs. Greville, in an accent of most profound contempt. “I did not know that you thought seriously of that kind of nonsense.”

It was Silvia’s turn to look up in wonder.

“Do *you* not ?” she asked.

“No,” was the very candid reply, with a merry laugh, “most certainly not. Where should I have been if I had even dreamed of such a thing ?”

“Is it not an essential of life ?” asked Silvia.

“No ; or, again, where should I be ? I have passed my life without it. I never loved any one or anything except my own self.”

“I cannot believe it,” said Silvia, hesitatingly.

“I assure you it is true. I have a very kindly feeling for most people. When it is possible, without inconveniencing myself, I would gladly help any one. For some people I have, I need not say, a much more kindly liking than for others ; but as for love—I never did, and never intend giving way to any such vagary.”

“But,” said Silvia, looking slightly shocked, “your husband—what of him ?”

“I had the greatest respect for him,” said Mrs. Greville. “He was a kind, worthy man ; but love—why, Silvia, I was married before I was twenty, and he was nearly sixty. I always consider myself a sensible woman ; when I was quite young I weighed my chances very carefully, and looked them in the face, and saw plainly what they were. I was well born, and had—so the world said—a pretty face ; I had good connections, and no fortune ; my duty was therefore, obviously, to look out for a rich husband. I told myself that there must be no nonsense over love.”

Mrs. Greville paused, to laugh at the horrified expression of Silvia's face.

"I was very systematic in my method of proceeding," she continued. "As soon as I went into society, I looked about for the wealthiest man in it. This I found to be Mr. Greville, of Lingholme, a retired capitalist, whose name was a pillar of strength among wealthy men. Almost before I saw him I said to myself that he would be the best possible match for me."

"But," interrupted Silvia, "there is no romance in such a life."

"Certainly not. Romance beautifies literature, helps to sell books; but if you want a peaceful life, keep clear of it. I frankly own that when I was introduced to Mr. Greville I did my best to fascinate him, and in a short time I had the pleasure of finding that I had succeeded; he made me an offer, and we were married. I know no two people who were happier; we never, that I remember, had one disagreeable word."

"It is not given to every one to be able to crush all heart, all sentiment and desire for affection out of their lives," said Silvia.

The beautiful face glowed again with merriment.

"Because people are so foolish; poets, painters, and romancers in general are to blame for it. Believe me, it is only an idea after all that the world cannot go on without love. If there were less of this nonsense it would be better. Silly boys and girls get their minds filled with absurd ideas about love, and they sacrifice all more sensible notions to it. Some of the wisest and happiest men and women have lived without it, and have made no murmur over their lives."

"But," remonstrated Silvia, "you say you love yourself.

Is it not, at least, more noble to love another, than to concentrate all your thoughts and anxieties on self?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature," said Mrs. Greville, "so that self-love must be something like a virtue too."

"*You* could never lose life or reason for love," said Silvia, thinking of the unhappy ladies she had known.

"No, indeed; I value both too highly. Now tell me, Silvia, why have you sacrificed such a brilliant career as the one lying before you if you would only be Madame De Laune?"

"I am not like you, I could not marry without love. I should care little for money, for position, rank, or any other advantage, but I must have love."

Mrs. Greville laughed good-temperedly.

"You are like all the other women I know, and you will wreck yourself upon some rock. Did you, then, Silvia, love your husband very much?"

The delicate face flushed and the lips quivered. Years had passed since the cottage on the Scottish lakes had been anything but a dream, but it had strange power to move her. Not one hour of that time was forgotten, not one pain, not one thrill of happiness, not one moment of the bitter anguish and shame. She remembered it all as though it had been but yesterday. Though life was brighter to her, and had grown broad in a thousand new claims, she still wished she had died before she had discovered the perfidy of the man she loved and trusted.

Other and more perplexing thoughts had come to her. She was present one evening at a brilliant reception given by an English peeress at Rome, and the conversation turned upon a great law-case that was just attracting the attention of all Eng-

land. It was of an English gentleman who had married in Scotland a beautiful and accomplished woman, whom he had professed to love very dearly. He had married her in the presence of witnesses, according to the Scotch formula. They had been known as man and wife for some two years, and now, upon his accession to higher rank and title, he was endeavoring to set the marriage aside.

CHAPTER LII.

AN INTERESTING DISCUSSION.

NO one understood the rapt expression of Silvia's face as she listened to this discussion. No two people agreed over it. Some said the marriage was valid, others that it was not; some said the marriage laws were so insecure that the marriage was valid in Scotland but not in England. Though absurd, that seemed to be the general impression, while Silvia, with whitening lips, asked :

“Can it be possible that a marriage should be legal in one country and not in another?”

She was told “yes,” that such a circumstance had often occurred, and would doubtless occur again.

“It seems horrible,” she said. “I cannot understand such a terrible state of things.”

She was talking to a gray-headed English gentleman, one who had been in parliament for many years, and the shocked expression of her beautiful face interested him.

“It will not be always so,” he said. “The attention of our legislators has been for some time aroused—there must be a reform.”

“There must be one!” cried Silvia, earnestly. “I always

thought that marriage was a solemn ceremony, binding people together in the name of Heaven, without reference to human laws."

"That is what it ought to be," said the old statesman; "and what it will be when the attention of the whole Christian world is aroused to the correction of abuses."

"There can be no end to the confusion that such a state of things causes," said Silvia.

"It seems to me one inviolable rule," said the gentleman, "and I think to every sensible, reasonable mind it will seem just. When people believe themselves in all good faith to have been married, then the marriage is legal and binding. I believe that opinion is general."

A thousand eager questions rose to her lips, but she repressed them. It would not do to excite curiosity by her words or manner.

"I knew a very painful instance many years ago," continued the statesman, seeing that Silvia was deeply interested in the subject; "a gentleman—we will call him Mr. Devereux—fell deeply in love with a young girl, who was, however, much below him in position. He took her to Scotland, went through the formula required by the Scottish marriage law; they lived as man and wife for three years. She had two sons. At the end of that time Mr. Devereux's fancy waned. He very coolly informed the young girl, who believed herself his wife, that the pretended marriage was no marriage at all; he settled a sum of money upon her and returned to England, and contracted an alliance with the daughter of a celebrated English peer."

"And she, the first wife?" asked Silvia, breathlessly.

"For some years she seemed to have been quite unconscious of her claims, then she asserted them. It is impossi-

ble to say what the decision might have been ; but the English wife died while the trial was pending, and the gentleman, making the best of matters, persuaded his first love to forgive him. She is known and received everywhere as the Countess A——, but between her husband and the relatives of the English lady he married there is a deadly feud that will one day or other lead to fatal consequences, I am afraid."

He did not know why the beautiful face looking into his had grown white with anguish.

"And you," she said ; "you, yourself, which of those two do you believe to be his lawful wife ?"

"I, myself," he repeated, "I believe in the first marriage, of course ; it was, in my opinion, a *bona fide* marriage. The girl herself believed it to be so, and in the sight of Heaven it was. But, Mrs. Rymer, you are ill—you are faint ; here I am talking to you, and you are looking very ill. Let me take you where you can get some fresh air."

"No ; I thank you," she replied. "I am sensitive, and your story shocked me."

He looked at the pure, delicate, lovely face, little dreaming how every word that he uttered was like balm to her aching heart, because it held forth the hope that her son was not the child of shame.

"I think," he said, quietly, "that it is by a special providence gentle and sensitive women are spared any great knowledge of the world's horrors."

Then the statesman's attention was claimed elsewhere, and Silvia was left alone. Lights, flowers, jewels, fair faces, all seemed to be whirling around her. She was hardly conscious, for the sudden conviction had come to her that if these marriages were legal, so was hers.

She had been married in perfect good faith ; there had not

been the faintest shadow of a doubt in her mind. She had been married according to the Scotch formula. Was it in the power of the man she accepted to be her husband, to set that marriage aside by a few words of his own?

It had not occurred to her before; she had most implicitly believed his decision, and had believed her marriage a pretense—a deception.

If it were true—dear Heaven, if it were true! if, instead of being that disgraced outcast she had learned to consider herself, she was indeed Alric Rymer's lawful wife; if her little son, instead of being nameless, had every claim upon his father; if this shame, this anguish, might pass away from her, if this bitter pain might no longer be hers!

The walls seemed to be closing round her. She was like a man who, after having been shut up in a dark dungeon for long, weary years, sees at length a gleam of sunlight. She saw this gleam, and it dazzled her; she longed to cry out, but her lips seemed to have grown white and stiff; her breath came in thick, hot gasps. Could it be possible that after all he had deceived her—that she was his lawful wife, and he had deserted her?

There was a sudden sensation in that brilliant assembly; the beautiful English lady, whose sweet face had been the center of all attraction, had suddenly fainted, and had to be carried from the room.

Mrs. Greville ordered her carriage and drove home at once; but it was some time before Silvia recovered from the shock. When she did, Mrs. Greville stood by her side, with a smile, as usual, on her lips.

“Why, Silvia,” she said, “you have been carrying on the arduous duties of chaperon now for some years, and never fell beneath the burden before; what was the matter to-night?”

"I do not know, I cannot tell," she said, in a trembling tone.

Mrs. Greville bent lower down, so as to look more closely at her.

"There is something new and strange in your face to-night, Silvia. What is it?—a light that is half a shadow."

Silvia made no answer, and Mrs. Greville turned from her.

"Ah, you will not trust me; but I am not a bad reader of faces. I am quite sure that, in some way or other, you have had something to do with the world's great destroyer—love. Did you see Monsieur de Laune?"

"No, I did not see him. Oh, Mrs. Greville, pray do not mention his name to me again. You do not know."

"Of course I do not know; you make no attempt to tell me; how am I likely to know? If you have any secrets, Silvia, you will find me a safe confidant."

But Silvia turned away in something like despair. How little any one could ever guess what her secret was like.

Mrs. Greville was very kind to her, insisting that she needed rest. But to Silvia that rest was peopled by thoughts so distracting that it was worse than work.

CHAPTER LIII.

"HE WAS A VILLAIN!"

ALL other interests for Silvia Rymer now merged into one —was she, or was she not, the lawful wife of the man she had married according to the Scotch formula and law? How anxiously she watched the progress of that long case could not be told in words. She read every line of it, never omitting one report; but it seemed to puzzle the wisest men.

In Ireland it was tried, and there, amid the ringing cheers of the people, the clashing of bells, and public rejoicing of all kinds, the verdict was given for the lady—unhesitatingly given. She was—agreed judge, jury, and counsel—the lawful wife of the man she had married. There was no mistake about it, there could be no question over it. She was his lawful wife. That might have been considered decisive; but it was tried again in England, and there the decision was reversed. Silvia grew bewildered as she read. Was it possible that in a country priding itself on the justness of its laws, the integrity of its morals, such injustice could be?

The more deeply she thought upon the matter, the more decidedly she agreed with the old statesman that when people believed themselves to have been married, the marriage was binding, legal, and valid. Yet the very doubt that assailed her seemed to her more terrible than all her former fears. She felt that she would give her life a hundred times over to know that the great weight of shame and reproach was hers no longer.

“I would die any death,” she said to herself, “I would suffer any torture, to know that in the sight of Heaven I am his lawful wife.”

She resolved, if she could meet the old statesman, Mr. Eversham, again, that she would give him the outline of her story, and ask his opinion of it. It would be a very easy, simple matter to bring the conversation round to the same subject, and then she would act by what he said. But fate, or fortune, seemed to be against her; they had met Mr. Eversham continually, but now that she *wanted* to see him, he had vanished completely from sight.

“Will you go to Madame Torlani’s to-night, Silvia?” asked Mrs. Greville. “There will be a brilliant reception; the Neapolitan princes are to be there.”

Silvia had not been well lately, and had not cared about going out. Suddenly her face cleared and brightened.

"Will Mr. Eversham be there?" she asked.

Mrs. Greville laughed.

"Is he the attraction? Yes, I should think so; he would not miss if he is still in Rome. I have not seen him lately. Why, Silvia, what interests you in Mr. Eversham? He is old enough to be your grandfather."

"I like to talk to him; he is clever and well informed," she replied.

"Well, every one to his or her own peculiar taste. I am glad, in any case, that you are going; it will do you good, and you have not been looking like yourself lately, at all."

"I have not been well," said Silvia.

"Ah! there has been something more than that; but never mind, I am not endowed with woman's most fatal gift—curiosity. I am not going to tease you with questions. You have been anxious and unhappy; there has been a strong fever of restlessness upon you; if speaking to Mr. Eversham will benefit you, you shall talk to him."

Mrs. Greville seemed so pleased at the idea of going out again with Silvia, that her companion was touched. They went to Madame Torlani's, and one of the first people they met was Mr. Eversham. Mrs. Greville, always ready to do a good-natured action, spoke to him and kept him by her side. Suddenly affecting to see some one she knew, she turned to him with that irresistible smile of hers.

"Mr. Eversham, will you talk to Mrs. Rymer? I see an old friend in the saloon, and I know she feels nervous in these crowded assemblies at being left alone."

Mr. Eversham's face brightened.

"You could not have conferred a greater pleasure upon me, madame," he said; and Mrs. Greville smiled as the old gentleman took his seat eagerly by the side of her beautiful companion.

But now that the grand wish of her heart was accomplished, Silvia hesitated, hardly knowing how to begin the conversation. It was, however, Mr. Eversham who commenced by asking her if she still kept up her interest in the great Scotch marriage trial. She told him "yes," that she read every line of it, and agreed with the Irish jury, who had decided in the lady's favor.

"So do I," he replied emphatically. "If I had been on the English jury *that* verdict should never have been given. I would have held out against it."

Then Silvia took courage, and, raising her beautiful eyes to his, said :

"You seem to understand these matters, Mr. Eversham. I want to tell you something of a young friend of mine, if you will listen."

"Listen ! Certainly I will. Do you think I could ask for anything more pleasant than to listen to you ?"

Some women in her place would have made a desperate attempt—would have thrown off all gravity, and have told their story so as to arrest his attention.

Not so Silvia ; she was too terribly in earnest. Her beautiful face grew quite white, her lips quivered, her eyes wore a piteous, pleading expression that would have melted the hardest heart. She was looking at him as though he held her fate in his hands.

"What of your friend ?" he asked at length. And she started as one who wakes suddenly from a deep sleep.

"You must consider my story as quite confidential," she

said ; and he did not know how tightly her hands clasped the pretty fan she carried.

“ I have been trusted with many secrets in my life,” he said, gravely. “ You may safely confide in me.”

“ My friend, years ago, was a simple, pretty, innocent, country girl, knowing nothing of the world or its ways ; simple, good, because she knew no evil, but most certainly valuing her good name above everything.

“ Perhaps she was not what the world calls a saint, yet, if the whole world had been offered to bribe her to do wrong, she would not have done it.”

He nodded, as though he would say that he quite understood the character.

“ To the village where she lived,” continued Silvia, “ there came a very handsome, clever, accomplished gentleman, who fell in love with her, and, after a time, asked her to be his wife. She consented.”

The words began to fall slowly from her lips, and the clasp of her white fingers grew more tight.

“ She, my friend, had a mother living, and there seemed to be no effort for, and no need of concealment, but at last the gentleman persuaded the young girl to elope with him, unknown to any one. I need not tell you what persuasions he used ; they seemed good to her, and nothing doubting, she went with him. They traveled together to Scotland, and there they were married.”

“ In what manner ? ” he asked, looking much interested in her story.

“ Before two witnesses ; he took her hand and repeated the formula of words, declaring that in the presence of witnesses he made her his wife. She did the same ; and they were known all over the neighborhood as man and wife. They had

one little boy, who was baptized by the minister of the parish in which they lived. I do not suppose that if any one had been told they were not man and wife such a thing would have been believed."

"Well?" said the old statesman, for she had paused, unable to continue.

"The young girl, my friend, believed in that marriage, as she believed in Heaven. I do not think anything in the wide world could have shaken her faith in it, until at last, suddenly, to her bewilderment, surprise, and anguish, he left her—he left her without one word, but he wrote to her and told her that the marriage was not legal; that he had never intended it to be legal; that he had provided amply for her and her little son."

"He was a villain!" said Mr. Eversham.

She raised her hand as though to ward off a blow.

"Oh! no—no!" she cried. "Do not say so."

Then recollecting herself suddenly, she grew still and calm.

"We do not know," she said. "We cannot tell how he was tempted. We may not know all the circumstances. There may be something that excuses him——"

"Nothing of the kind," he interrupted. "Women are so pitiful and so merciful, they would excuse any crime. I tell you he was a villain! What happened then?"

"He went away, as I have said, leaving my friend and her little child. For some short time she, poor girl, was almost mad; indeed, I think her reason did leave her. It was the shame, when she had trusted and believed in him so implicitly."

"Poor child!" he murmured. "It was very hard for her."

“She would not take his money—she never touched it. She accepted the doom laid upon her. She learned to look upon herself as one branded by the world. She went away from the home where she had been so happy, a broken-hearted, despairing woman ; she took nothing with her but her little child. She continued to live, always in sorrow, in shame, and in anguish ; still, she lived. Her boy grew strong and beautiful—everything prospered with her—but she never met him again. What I wanted to ask you is—*Do you think she was his lawful wife ?*”

CHAPTER LIV.

A LAWFUL WIFE.

SILVIA paused when she had asked that question. She did not know how the minutes fled, she did not know how the time passed. The brilliant scene—the lights, the fair faces, and shining gems—all faded away from her ; she saw nothing but the shrewd old face bent over hers. It seemed to her that time stood still. Her last question sounded in her ears as loud as though it had been echoed through the room. She was hardly conscious, so intense was her anxious expectation ; the sound of Mr. Eversham’s voice came to her with a half-startled shock.

“Was she his lawful wife ?” he repeated, slowly, as though he were weighing the question. “You say she married in all good faith and sincere belief ?”

“Most certainly she did,” replied Silvia.

“And that they were well known in that part of Scotland where they lived as man and wife ?”

“There never was the least doubt of it.”

"Was she—your friend—married in her own name?" he continued.

"Yes, there was no attempt made at disguising it."

"Did he take an assumed name, or did he use the one he was always known by?"

"That I cannot tell; but he was known in England by the same name—I do not think it was assumed. What do you think, Mr. Eversham—do you believe that marriage was legal?"

Her agitation was so great that the wonder was he did not perceive it. Her face was white, her hands trembled, her lips quivered—she looked like one awaiting a sentence of life or death.

"I should certainly say myself that it was both legal and binding. I am sure of one thing, that it was valid before Heaven, and I believe before men."

She did not speak again for some minutes; the strain upon her nerves had been too great; the tight grasp of her fingers relaxed, her lips quivered with a long-drawn sigh. It was only by the exertion of the greatest self-control that she was able to keep herself from a deadly swoon.

"I am very much interested in your friend," said Mr. Eversham. "Did she never make any claim for her rights, or seek to establish the marriage in any way?"

"No," replied Silvia. "She did as I say; she accepted the doom that was laid upon her without murmur, and without making any effort to redress her wrongs."

"Did he marry again?" asked Mr. Eversham.

"Even that I cannot tell you, but I should imagine so."

"Then he has rendered himself liable to an action for bigamy. I will tell you what I will do, Mrs. Rymer. My legal knowledge is good, and profound, I believe, as far as it goes,

but I will not rely on that alone. I have a friend in London, an eminent counsellor, Mr. Holkstone. I will write to him. Counsel's opinion is generally safe."

"You are very kind to take so much interest," she said.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Rymer, do not let me deceive you; my interest is for you, not for your friend. If she were *not* your friend, I should hardly be philanthropist sufficient to take any trouble. Such stories are, unfortunately, so common. However, I will write; and if you will permit me, I shall do myself the pleasure of waiting upon you when the answer comes."

"You do not know how grateful I shall be," she said. "Mr. Eversham, will that answer be decisive?"

"I should be content to abide by it," he replied. "There are few men in the world equal to Holkstone in legal matters. If he says that first marriage was valid, you may safely rely upon it that your friend is all right. If he says 'no,' I am afraid she must abide by the decision."

"If it should be 'yes,'" said Silvia, musingly, "what is to be done then?"

Mr. Eversham looked up with great animation.

"Your friend, of course, will please herself; but were I in her place, I should take immediate steps for securing my right place in the world. I should unmask the man, bring an action against him, let all the world see that he is unworthy of credit, let his true character be known."

A light almost divine came over her face.

"She will not do that, I think; but it will comfort her to know that she does not really deserve the brand of the world's scorn."

"Did you not say that she had a son?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, in a faltering voice; "a beautiful, princely boy."

"Then let her sacrifice herself as she may, she has no right to sacrifice him. There! we have moralized long enough, Mrs. Rymer. Here comes Madame Torlani, and with her the Neapolitan princes. Talk of handsome men, there you see them."

He talked to her good-naturedly, believing that he was amusing her, and showing great knowledge of the world; but she never heard one word; her whole thoughts were engaged in the one grand wonder as to what the counsel's opinion would be. She interrupted him in the midst of a brilliant description of the late Queen of Naples, by asking him how long it would be, in all probability, before he received the answer?

He looked amused, not angry.

"What a devoted friend you are!" he said, with a laugh. "In ordinary cases we should have to wait three weeks or more; but I will ask Mr. Holkstone to devote a few hours to this at once. He will oblige me, I am sure. You may expect me in ten days from now."

"Ten days!" she repeated to herself. "How shall I live through them? How shall I live through each minute, each hour?"

Then Mrs. Greville came, with many laughing remarks upon their long interview; the carriages were ordered, and the brilliant reception of Madame Torlani was at an end.

"I begin to have my suspicions," said Mrs. Greville, laughingly, as they drove home through the moonlit streets. "After talking so sentimentally about love, I verily believe you intend captivating Mr. Eversham."

"I do not, indeed," said Silvia, with such earnest gravity

that Mrs. Greville was still more amused. It was with difficulty she heard and replied to the gay young widow's remarks, so much was at stake for her. In ten days she should know whether she had any claim to the name of wife ; whether her boy could use his father's name ; whether the horrible brand that had depressed and humiliated her was to be removed ; whether she might open her heart to the brighter influence of life, and let the mantle of shame and sorrow fall from her. All this was at stake, and bright jesting words seemed cruel to her ; she could not understand them ; she stood on the balance—life or death.

Ten whole days, and each day was twenty-four hours long ! Ah ! if she could but pass the intervening time in one long, dreamless sleep ! But every moment must be lived through, and life cannot be set aside.

If the answer were "yes," what then ? It would take from her the stigma of shame, but it would not, it could not give back to her the lost love, the lost happiness, the lost dreams of her youth. Nothing could give back to her her lost love, the hero she had worshiped ; nothing could repay her for the tears she had shed, the anguish she had endured, the burning sense of desolation and misery through which she had passed ; nothing could give her back the past, and restore the shattered idols that lay in ruins around her.

During those days of suspense she did not care to look forward. If the answer should be "no," there was nothing for her but to bear it patiently, to go on doing her best, and endure her lot as best she might.

But if it should be "yes." She dare not look forward ; she dare not think what she should do, what she should say, what steps she should take.

Then it flashed across her suddenly that she should not

know where to seek or to find Ulric Rymer. She had a dim, vague idea that he was a man high in station. How was she to find him? In all the years she had lived since he left her she had never once heard his name; and if he were of high rank, as she half believed, she must have heard it.

Was he living or dead? It did not occur to her, as it would have done to many women, that the most sensible and straightforward course would be to write to the lawyers whom he had mentioned in his letter. The thought never once occurred to her.

"When I go back to London," she said to herself, "I will ask about him. I will make all kinds of inquiries. If he be living, I will find him; if he be dead, I will find his grave."

She lived through the ten days—in after years she could not have told how—but they came to an end at last. It was the eleventh when Mr. Eversham made his appearance at the villa, and asked for Mrs. Rymer.

Her heart beat, as she entered the saloon, so loud and so fast she could hardly speak. One glance showed her that the letter had arrived. He held a long strip of parchment in his hand.

She did her best for little Cyril's sake; she nerved herself to act and speak calmly. Mr. Eversham greeted her warmly.

"I am one day behind my time," he said; "but the letter did not come till this morning, and I have hastened here with it."

She looked up in his face; he saw the intensity of her agitation.

"What does he say?" she murmured.

"Good news for your friend, Mrs. Rymer. The marriage was perfectly legal, and she was his lawful wife!"

CHAPTER LV.

A PLEASANT ANTICIPATION.

IT was some time before Silvia could recover herself at all. The world seemed to have ended—time to stand still. The curse that had clung to her for years had fallen from her at last. At last she stood free and unfettered, able to raise her head with its halo of innocence undimmed; able to take her place where she had always most wished to stand—among the honorable rank of women, whose pride and boast is a fair name.

Mr. Eversham saw that she was completely overcome.

“You love your friend very much,” he said gently. “Now let me read this paper to you.”

It was somewhat obscure in its legal phraseology, but the sense of it was plain enough, even to her half-bewildered mind. There might be doubt elsewhere, but there was none in the mind of the clever lawyer. He saw no flaw in the marriage, it was evident.

“The lady has ground sufficient for an action at law,” he wrote, “and there is no doubt that it would be decided in her favor.”

“So you see, Mrs. Rymer,” said Mr. Eversham, “your friend has the law, as it were, in her own hands.”

He saw that she was too much agitated to reply coherently, but no suspicion of the truth came over him. He never dreamed that he had been making inquiries for her, or they would have been more zealously made. He thought her friend must be an old schoolmate, to whom she was warmly attached, and he admired her all the more for her intense and kindly sympathy toward others.

It was a relief to Silvia when Mrs. Greville entered the room. She advanced to greet the old statesman with outstretched hands. She had so much to say to him that Silvia's silence was unheeded. They talked of Rome, Madame Torlani, of the brilliant receptions, of everything that was gay and amusing. No one surpassed Mrs. Greville in that kind of conversation—all sparkle, brilliancy, and nonsense. Mr. Eversham enjoyed it very much, and after a time took his leave. Then Mrs. Greville went up to Silvia, and, bending over her, kissed her. She was not given to caressing, or any great demonstration, and Silvia looked up with a sudden gleam of affection.

“Secrets still?” said Mrs. Greville. “I must not ask what they are, but, Silvia, there is a look in your face to-day that I have never seen before.”

She raised her head proudly. It was the first time for years, Heaven help her, that she had dared to raise it among honorable women!

“I have heard good news,” she said, briefly. And then other visitors came in and the conversation ended.

But Silvia was left like one bewildered. In vain that day she took up books to read, fancy work, sewing, writing—she could not keep her attention fixed on any one thing for many minutes. All that she could remember—the only idea that she could keep in her mind—was, she was Ulric Rymer's lawful wife.

She could find no rest indoors; she went out into the sunlit garden, and bending over the pretty fountains, saw her face reflected in the clear, shining waters. For the first time for many years its beauty pleased her. She had forgotten what it was like to feel the least thrill of pleasure or delight in her girlish loveliness; but now, as she looked at the fair face in the tranquil waters, she was pleased that Cyril's should be

comely in all eyes. Perhaps there came to her a remembrance of the time when some one else had praised that face, and had called it fairest of the fair. She saw herself a difference of expression ; the face she had been accustomed to see down-cast, with an expression half of shame, half of desire to be hidden from the world's sight ; the face upon which she gazed now, was fearless in its expression of innocence.

Even the dancing waters and the sunlit garden oppressed her. She went into her own room, and, kneeling by her bed, she thanked Heaven for having delivered her from the curse and bondage she thought only to lose in death. No one can tell how great her relief was, except those, who, like her, have lived under the shadow of a dark cloud and suddenly find that cloud vanished.

When the first ecstasy of her happiness had passed, she was able to think more clearly ; she was no nearer her lost love than before ; the smart of his desertion was no less ; the pain of her loss was keen as ever ; but the one great happiness was hers. She was before God and man a lawful wedded wife. Of this joy no one could rob her. No one could take it from her. Even if she never saw him again, she should take this source of happiness with her to the grave. She could not decide upon any plans ; the only thought that occurred to her was that when she returned to England she would do her best to find him.

A few days afterward Mrs. Greville said to her :

“Silvia, do you know how long it is since we left England?”

“Yes ; I have kept a faithful record of each day,” was the truthful reply.

“And though you have said nothing about it, though you have neither murmured nor complained, I can imagine

that each day has seemed an age, because of your great love for your boy."

"I should like to see him again," said Silvia, wistfully; "but, though I have not actually seen him, three days have never passed without my hearing about him. Mr. Hardman has sent me a photograph of him; but my heart aches for one look at him."

"I think we have been away long enough. I purpose returning to London for the season. What do you think?"

A sudden, burning flush dyed her fair face—it was the very desire of her heart put into words.

"I should like it better than anything else in this wide world," said Silvia, eagerly.

"You would have liked it long ago, but have not said so. I suspect we will go to Lingholme, and you shall have your boy there for a week—all to yourself—and then we will go to London."

Silvia was delighted. Mrs. Greville watched the beautiful face with admiring surprise.

"The time will come, I honestly believe, when I shall be jealous of you, Silvia, if you grow much prettier. I must look to my laurels already."

There was great and general disappointment expressed when it was known that Mrs. Greville and her beautiful friend intended leaving Rome; but Silvia looked forward eagerly to the time. Her interest in everything seemed dead; she had but one idea, one thought, one longing, and it was to be in London, where she could make inquiries after her long-lost lover.

Did he know that marriage was legal? She could not tell. At times she thought not—that his intention had been through-out to deceive her; but then he was a man of the world, who un-

derstood the world's ways ; it was barely possible that he should be mistaken. Knowing it, had he married again ? She lost herself in a thousand conjectures ; she was almost bewildered by the chaos of thought that seemed at times to overwhelm her.

"You do not regret leaving Rome," said Mrs. Greville to her on the morning of their departure. "You look as delighted as possible over it. Do you forget how many adoring loves you leave behind ?"

"The adoring loves do not trouble me in the least," said Silvia. "I feel quite indifferently over them."

And the gay widow, who lived upon the breath of adulation and homage, looked with wonder and surprise at the calm, fair face of the woman who had cared so little for the brilliant offers of marriage she had received as barely to remember them.

The journey to England seemed very long to Silvia, every hour increased her impatience. What could Cyril be like ? It seemed so long since she had left him. He would be seven years old—a baby no longer, but growing rapidly. How her mother's heart yearned for him !

"How *could* I have left him ?" she asked herself, over and over again. "And yet I have done better for him than if I spent my income in keeping up a house for him."

By Mrs. Greville's kindly-expressed wish, she wrote to Mr. Hardman, telling him of her return to England, and her longing desire to see the boy.

"I cannot," she wrote, "go to Hampstead ; but I beg of you to send some trustworthy messenger with my boy at once, and let him remain at least a week at Lingholme."

"Home is pleasant, after all," said Mrs. Greville, on the evening of their return. "I ran away from English winters and English fogs, but, after all, they have a charm of their own. I do not think I shall go away again."

It was pleasant. February had come in very fair guise that year. The snowdrops were peeping above the ground, there was a faint odor of violets in the shady parts of the wood, green buds were forming on hedge and tree ; there was new life in the fresh, cold, bracing breeze ; the sky was blue and clear, and the sun shone. It seemed to Silvia as though all things living shared in her happiness, and spoke to her of a new and brighter life.

Lingholme had never looked so fair. When she left it, the consciousness of shame and sorrow had hidden the beauty of the world from her, as a dark veil spread over the fair creation would have done. The veil was removed now ; she could see the beauty of earth and of heaven. Sorrow and pain existed still for her, but not shame ; and everything else seemed easy to bear.

It was on the third day after their arrival that the letter came telling her that little Cyril would be at Lingholme that day. Her face grew perfectly white as she read, and Mrs. Greville, looking at her with a kindly smile, said :

“Never mind keeping up appearances, my dear ; leave me, and go and prepare for him. Perhaps, if I had had a little child, I might have loved it as you do yours.”

CHAPTER LVI.

MRS. GREVILLE'S VISITOR.

THE February evening was drawing to a close ; a purple light lingered over the trees ; the sunshine had long since faded ; the air was cool and fresh with the fragrance of early violets and the sweet, moist woodlands. Surely, under the broad, blue heavens, on the face of the fair, tranquil earth

there was no heart so impatient as that of the beautiful young mother, who was pacing, with rapid footsteps, the western terrace, from whence she could see the carriage-drive. The little boy was to reach Lingholme at six, and since four she had been waiting for him.

She had prepared a little room by the side of her own. She had prepared his little bed. Everything that a mother's heart could suggest, or a mother's hand could do, had been done, and she was waiting for him now with a heart full of impatience. It seemed to her that every hour was an age, every moment an hour. The light was fading in the western skies—would he never come?

Suddenly she saw the carriage turning round the grand drive. She flew rather than walked. She opened the door. She cried in a loud, vehement voice:

“Cyril! Cyril! where are you?”

The next she had him in her arms. She covered his face with kisses and tears; she lavished on him every fond name, every tender word, every loving epithet, until the child looked up at her in wonder.

“Do I frighten you, my darling?” she cried. The carriage was driven on to the house then, and Cyril was standing under the chestnut trees in the grand drive. She had flung herself on her knees at his feet, and was clinging to him with a loving, passionate clasp. “Do I frighten you, my darling?” she asked again. “My heart hungered for one look at you, my soul seemed thirsty. Cyril, call me ‘mother’—say ‘mother’ to me, so that I may know I am not dreaming.”

The child clasped his arms slowly round her neck.

“Mother,” he said, gently, “I am so pleased to be with you again.”

The voice seemed to pierce her heart with its sweet, familiar tones—it was Ulric's voice. It had the same ring, the same music, the self-same accent and inflections. She could have fancied it was Ulric who spoke to her, and she looked up, with a low, passionate cry, into the child's face.

As she gazed, her own grew white with the pallor of death. Was fancy playing her some trick? Were her own senses deluding her? The face was very young, smooth and fair, but it was Ulric Rymer's face in miniature. There was the same rich, clustering hair, the broad, white brow, the eloquent eyes, the beautiful lips, the perfectly molded features. One drop of water did not resemble another more closely than the face of Cyril, the son, resembled that of Ulric, the father.

A low, passionate cry, and then she laid her head on the child's breast.

She was face to face once more with the love of her heart, the love of her youth.

"How shall I live and look on him?" she murmured.

Then the child's voice roused her.

"Mother, those tall trees almost frighten me. See, they are bending their heads as though they were going to speak to me. Shall we go home?"

She roused herself from that passionate trance of anguish, and took the little hand in hers.

"It is such a pretty home, Cyril," she said, gently. "We have flowers and birds. I shall find a pony for you to ride."

"Is it *our* home?" asked the child. "Is it yours?"

"No. We shall have a home some day, Cyril; but this is not ours. It belongs to a very good, kind lady, who will be pleased to see you."

The mention of a pony quite opened the child's heart. He

ran by his mother's side, prattling gayly, telling her all his school experience, his play, his lessons, forgetting to be shy, only remembering that she was the darling mother he had longed so intensely to see. Perhaps it was one of the proudest moments of her life when she took the boy into Mrs. Greville's boudoir.

The mistress of Lingholme, notwithstanding all her little affectations, was a kindly-natured lady. She gave the little stranger the warmest welcome. She took him in her arms, and kissed the beautiful face, then looked so earnestly at it that Silvia wondered.

"My boy does not resemble me," she said, gently.

"No, not in the least; but his face recalls some one or other to my mind—I cannot imagine whom it is like. Is he like his father?"

Then for one half moment Silvia's heart stood still. Would it hurt him, her idolized child, to say that he had his father's face? No, for she was his father's wife. It was half-proudly, half-sorrowfully that she answered:

"I think he is. There seems to me a great likeness."

Mrs. Greville was still looking at the child with the same intent, earnest gaze.

"I cannot remember whom it is that he resembles so closely. His face is full of pleasant associations for me. Was your husband an Englishman, Silvia?"

"Yes, he was English," she replied, and then the matter dropped; but whenever Mrs. Greville's eyes fell upon the child they took the same wondering expression.

For a few days Silvia was perfectly happy: she almost forgot her troubles in the presence of that beloved and beautiful child. With an anxious heart she watched his every action, and listened to every word. There was no taint of selfishness

in him. Once or twice she had grown half faint with dread, lest having his father's face he should inherit his faults; but she saw no trace of them, and from the depths of her heart she thanked God. He was a brave, generous, unselfish child, full of noble instincts and good impulses; it never seemed to occur to him to be mean or selfish. Mrs. Greville watched him with shrewd amusement.

"Your boy ought to be a prince, Silvia," she said, laughing. "He is the most princely child I ever met; his ideas are superb."

Silvia sighed. A prince! Oh! if she could only give him a name that was stainless and unsullied, she would ask no better gift from Heaven than that.

When the week was ended Mrs. Greville was the first to object to his leaving Lingham.

"It is so long since he has been with you, let him stay now that he is here. I have changed my mind over London; I shall not go yet. Lady Courcie has a party of friends coming to the Mount, and I know several of them. I shall stay here a few weeks longer."

Had she not so remained, would the story have been different?

So it was arranged by general consent that little Cyril should remain until they went to London; then his mother could take him to school herself.

Two days afterward came an invitation that Mrs. Greville had expected, for her to go to the Mount to meet Lady Courcie's friends.

"You must amuse yourself as well as you can, my dear," she said to Silvia. "I suppose you will want nothing else, now that you have the boy."

So for a few days mother and child were inexpressibly happy together; then came a note from Mrs. Greville.

“I shall not be at home until Wednesday,” it ran, “and I shall bring a friend with me—Lady Dynecourt. Her husband is away just at present, and she is not very strong ; the noise and excitement of a large party are too much for her. I have asked her to spend a few days quietly at Lingholme. Will you see that everything is ready for her ? ”

Silvia suddenly remembered the photograph of the beautiful face, and felt pleased at the prospect of seeing one so charming as she felt sure Lady Dynecourt must be. She looked forward to the visit as to a new source of pleasure, and busied herself in having everything ready for the expected arrival.

It was night when Mrs. Greville and her visitor arrived. Little Cyril had gone to sleep, and Silvia sat in the drawing-room alone, awaiting the coming of the ladies. At first sight she was charmed with Lady Dynecourt—there was something winning and noble about her patrician beauty ; yet, to Silvia’s keen instinct, there was something mournful too. She was most gracious, most charming, most amiable, but despite all the grace and sweetness, there was an undercurrent of melancholy.

“She is very lovely,” thought Silvia, “very graceful ; but I am sure she is not happy.”

Yet not one word fell from Lady Dynecourt’s lips that could be taken as a sign of melancholy. She joined in all conversations, she had a very beautiful smile, a most charming fashion of seeming to give her whole attention to every one who claimed it ; but Silvia saw underneath all this a constant current of sadness—a constant return to some secret source of unhappiness.

Lady Dynecourt was quite delighted with Silvia ; her beauty, grace, her affectionate, warm-hearted disposition,

seemed to have a great attraction for her. When they parted for the night, she held Silvia's hand in her own.

"Mrs. Greville tells me you have a little son staying with you," she said, wistfully.

Something in her face made Silvia ask :

"Have you any children, Lady Dynecourt?"

The beautiful face grew pale.

"No," she replied, gently ; "I have none."

CHAPTER LVII.

A STRANGE RESEMBLANCE.

THERE is nothing, after all, so limited as human knowledge. A man devotes his whole lifetime to the study of one particular star, one planet, one bird, and he dies without knowing one-half there is to know. Another gives his whole thoughts and attention to the solving of a problem, yet dies leaving it unsolved. Silvia Rymer had but one object in life—it was the finding of her lost lover. She was under the same roof with his wife, but knew no more of it than did Lady Dynecourt, in her turn, suspect who she was. They were fated to meet, and they had met, but it was without recognition. The two, both betrayed by the same love, had crossed each other's paths at last.

The morning after her arrival Lady Dynecourt had gone out in the grounds alone. She had a love, almost amounting to a passion, for trees, and from the windows of her room she had caught sight of the beautiful chestnut drive, and she hastened there. Mrs. Greville was far too accomplished a hostess to dream of interference. If her guest preferred a solitary ramble, it seemed to her the perfection of good breeding

to indulge that wish ; so Lady Clotilde wandered under the chestnuts, feeling more at her ease and happier than she had done for some time. She stopped to listen to the faint chirping of the birds, to watch the white heads of the pretty snowdrops. A faint color flushed her beautiful, noble face, a faint smile played round her lips. Only Heaven knew what fair dreams of her youth returned to her as she enjoyed this hour among the leafless trees.

The sound of a child's laughter struck her, a burst of melodious laughter that seemed to cheer and brighten the air around. She looked up with a quick, bright smile. Like many childless women, she had a passionate love of children. In the far distance she saw a little boy at play, and Mrs. Rymer was just crossing the drive to go to him. Lady Clotilde hastened to join her.

"That is your little son?" she said; and Silvia looked up with a quick, warm flush.

"How I envy you!" continued her ladyship. "If I had been offered my choice between the wealth of all the world and a little child, I would have chosen the child."

Silvia's beautiful face, full of sympathy, was raised to hers.

"I do not wonder at it," she replied; "there is no gift of Heaven so good."

"I often wonder about it," continued Lady Dynecourt. "I read such shocking, cruel things in the papers, of children killed, and starved, and cruelly treated! If Heaven had only trusted one to me, I would have taken such care of it—and they are given to those who do not care for them. I feel tempted sometimes to wonder how it is."

"I have often thought of it, too," said Silvia; and they walked together down the long drive.

"To me, or rather in my case," said Lady Clotilde, "it

seems very hard. My husband, Lord Dynecourt, longs so intensely for a son and heir. The property at his death passes to a stranger, one of the branch of the family whom he dislikes ; that makes it so much more painful. Every allusion to the future makes my heart ache. When I see him indifferent over anything connected with the property, I think directly it is because a stranger must step in where his son should tread."

"It must be a great trouble to you," said Silvia ; "I can understand it so well." And to herself she thought : "'Every heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and this poor lady knows hers."

She grew deeply interested in Lady Clotilde ; there was something so winning, so lovable, so true about her. As she looked at the beautiful face, she caught herself wondering what Lord Dynecourt was like, and thinking how very dearly he must love this gentle wife of his—wondering, too, what the shadow on her face meant, and why it was there.

Suddenly, with a peal of childish laughter, little Cyril ran into the drive toward them. Silvia stooped and took him in her arms ; she put back the rich cluster of hair from his brow, and then, with motherly pride, said :

"This is my son, Lady Dynecourt."

What had happened ?

What was there in the childish, beautiful face that seemed to hold Lady Dynecourt entranced ?

She had grown white as the snowdrops, and in her eyes there was a wandering, piteous look. It was only by a violent effort that she aroused herself.

"How strange you must think me !" she said ; "but there is something so familiar to me in that face—it seems to me as though I had known it and lived with it."

"It is strange," said Silvia; "but Mrs. Greville said the same thing."

The pallor deepened on Lady Clotilde's face.

"Has she said so? Has she noticed it?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Noticed what?" asked Silvia, in amaze.

Then Lady Clotilde remembered herself.

"I mean—does she, too, fancy that she can trace a resemblance to some one she knows?"

"So she says," replied Silvia.

Lady Clotilde sat down on one of the garden chairs, and took little Cyril on her knee. Eagerly, anxiously, with wistful, wondering eyes, she scanned each feature of his face. There could be no mistake about it; fancy was not misleading her, nor was imagination deceiving her.

The face into which she gazed so earnestly resembled that of *her* husband, Basil, Lord Dynecourt, exactly as one drop of water resembles another.

She could not account for it. Of course it must be purely accidental; yet, was there ever anything so startling? the very line of the clustering curls, they fell from the brow in precisely the same fashion; the color of his eyes, the drooping of the long lashes; there could be no more perfect resemblance. Of course, it was accidental, yet it hurt her with a strange pain.

Why should a stranger's child wear his face, while her arms were empty? Lady Clotilde sighed deeply, and warm, bright tears filled her eyes.

"Has your little boy's father been long dead?" she asked.

"It is six years now since I lost him," said Silvia, evasively.

"Had he relatives in England? Was he an Englishman?"

asked Lady Clotilde, and her eyes seemed as though they would pierce every thought in Silvia's heart.

She was able to answer with truth, that she had never heard her husband speak of his relatives.

"You loved him very dearly?" said Lady Clotilde, gently.

A warm flush rose to the beautiful face.

"I loved him ten thousand times more dearly than my own life," replied Silvia.

"Ah! that is the right way to love. I have an opinion of my own, and that opinion is, there is no equality in love. One gives all, another reserves all. I do not think it possible to find husband and wife who have an equal love for each other."

"Even that doctrine is not so terrible as some of Mrs. Greville's," replied Silvia, with a smile; "she disbelieves in love altogether."

"Therein she is mistaken; much unhappiness may spring from it, but it would be a wretched world without it."

Still she never put the child down, or took her eyes from his face. She asked his name, and he looked at her as he replied:

"Cyril Rymer."

Ah! even the very tone of the childish voice! Was it a mockery? She could have imagined that Lord Dynecourt stood speaking.

"I cannot help thinking," she said to Silvia, "that I must know some of your husband's relatives—this face and voice are so familiar. Did you know *anything* of your husband's family?"

It was a relief to answer truthfully—no, that she did *not*. She began to wonder at Lady Clotilde's strange manner. Of

whom or what did he remind her? Her eyes almost asked the question, and Lady Dynecourt saw it; she tried to repress her eagerness and her curiosity; she talked to the little one, and listened with delight to his pretty answers.

“Why, Cyril,” she said, “you will soon be a man.”

“I wish it were now,” he replied; “then I could always take care of mamma.”

“You love mamma so much?” said Lady Dynecourt, wistfully.

“She is all I have in the world,” replied the child, with unconscious pathos; “I cannot help loving her.”

“If he were but mine!” said Lady Clotilde. “I would give all my money, Cyril—everything that I have in the world—for a little boy like you.”

He laughed, as though the idea of another little boy just like himself were a great joke; then Silvia told him to run away, he would tire the lady.

The child looked up into the wistful face with a smile; he clasped his little arms round Lady Clotilde’s neck.

“You are a beautiful lady,” he said; “I love you very much.”

She kissed him, then let him down, with tears in her eyes. She rose abruptly, and walked away. Silvia did not follow her; she seemed by instinct to understand that the beautiful, unhappy lady would prefer to be alone.

But after that morning it was wonderful to see how fond Lady Dynecourt became of the boy; she was always asking for him, always begging to have him with her.

“I shall hope to see little Cyril in London,” she said.

“You must be kind to me, Mrs. Rymer, and let me have him for a whole week to myself.”

And Silvia, who would have done anything to console and

comfort her, laughingly promised that she should have him whenever she wished.

They little dreamed that it was to his own father's house the child had been invited—the house that, if right prevailed, must one day be his.

CHAPTER LVIII.

PUZZLING QUESTIONS.

THAT marriage is a lottery, is a true saying; that some draw rich prizes, others bitter blanks, is equally trite and true. The world had not quite made up its mind as to the result of Lady Clotilde's marriage. Some, who looked no deeper than the surface, declared it to be a happy one. Lord and Lady Dynecourt were generally seen together; no one ever heard an unpleasant or disagreeable word pass between them; the gentleman was, to all appearances, kind, considerate, and attentive, the lady happy.

“It was sad that Lord Dynecourt would have no heir,” every one agreed on that point; but “every heart knows its own bitterness,” and Lady Clotilde knew the height and depth.

She had married Lord Dynecourt because she loved him, and she looked forward to a kind of ideal happiness with him. She saw only the better and brighter side of his character; she was disposed to make a hero of him. She did not think it possible that he should be anything except good and great. She loved him exceedingly. She had been greatly admired, sought after; she had had many lovers, but the only man who ever touched her heart was Basil, Lord Dynecourt; she never cared for another.

There never was a marriage that gave greater promise of

turning out well ; they were both young, gifted with beauty, wealth, rank—everything that could make life desirable ; the future before them seemed bright as the sun that shone on their wedding-day—there was no cloud to dim its radiance.

How, then, had such a marriage prospered ? “ Excellently ! ” said the world. What said Lady Clotilde ? Even to her own self she shrank from owning the truth—that she was disappointed ; that she was unhappy ; that a something without name—a shadow—had grown between her husband and herself ; a distance, a coldness, that increased as the days went on. She could not explain it ; she could not tell how it was ; she could not remember even when it had begun. She could not trace the first origin of that coldness and chill sense of disappointment that so soon destroyed her happiness. Was it that she fancied he did not give to her the same superabundant, grand, generous love that she gave to him ? Was it that she found him less noble, less heroic, more commonplace than she had fancied he would be ? Was it because, at times, in the hush and the dead of night, she heard the name of another woman on his lips, and heard him murmur words of endearment, such as he never addressed to her ?

She remembered so well the time that happened first—how she had listened to him with a beating heart, and, when morning dawned, had said to him :

“ Basil, did you dream of me last night ? ”

Laughing at the question and anxious face, he answered :

“ No ; I ought to be ashamed, perhaps, at the confession, but I really did not.”

“ Who were you calling ‘ love,’ and speaking so gently to, then ? ”

“ I did not know that I ever talked in my sleep,” he replied, hastily.

“You did ; you often do. Basil, do not be afraid to tell me : did you love any one before you met me ?”

He answered by a careless laugh.

“Why, Clotilde, what a question ! I was not a statue, neither did I live in a desert, and men, my dear, are but men.”

“That is no answer to my question,” she said, wondering at the evasion. “Did you love any one before you knew me ?”

“I may safely say, Clotilde, that I lived in a chronic state of being in love from the time I was seven years old until now.”

“I never thought of you as such a general lover,” she said, slightly piqued.

“Did you not ? Why, Clotilde, I wonder that you have never discovered my weakness before.”

“You will not answer my question,” she said. “You will not tell me whether you *really* loved any one before you loved me.”

Again the careless laugh that jarred upon her feelings, that hurt her as a physical pain, then he replied gayly :

“Of course I never cared for any one one-thousandth part as much as I care for you ;” but the ring of the words was false, she felt that the words themselves were false, and from that hour a dark shadow, slowly, but surely, arose between them.

She was too noble a woman to yield to curiosity ; she might have listened to his dreaming words ; she might have looked among his papers ; she might have played the spy upon him in a hundred different ways, but she was far too noble for that.

The grand dream of her life was destroyed, she could no

longer delude herself into thinking that she was the sole object of her husband's love. Cruel doubt and jealousy had begun what is always fatal work; and though she would never own it even to herself, Lady Dynecourt's short dream of happiness was at an end.

If the desire of her heart had been given to her; if she had had little children to love, and to love her, she would not perhaps have dwelt so continually on this one theme; her thoughts would have been better and brighter. Her dream had always been one of love, and no other.

Women feel nothing more keenly than the gradual downfall of an idol. Lady Clotilde had made an ideal hero of her lover, in her girlish, romantic fashion; she had endowed him with grand and noble qualities; she had to watch these ideal qualities disappear, one by one; she had thought him the very soul of truth and honor; she had to find out that he was no more truthful than other men; that though perhaps he would have scorned what the world calls a lie, he was guilty of the same evasions, the same equivocations as other people. He was, in fact, no hero, and after a time she was obliged to own that to herself.

The thing, perhaps, that startled her most, was his light way of speaking of things she held in the highest honor. Love was but a jest; inconstancy, rather a subject of pride than otherwise; infidelity, a mere matter of course; and when once or twice she had shown him plainly that she did not like to hear such sentiments, he had laughed and called her a pretty prude.

"You make life a tragedy, Clotilde," he said to her, "and it was never intended for anything but a farce."

"You dishonor what I honor most," she said, coldly.

Yet, despite this intangible difference, this something with-

out a name, there was never any open disagreement between them. Lady Clotilde was not the only one condemned to see her life laid bare and waste ; she bore it with patient dignity, she made no murmur, no complaint. Did she love her husband the less? Those who understand a woman's heart best can answer the question.

The strange likeness existing between the child and her husband puzzled her. Mrs. Rymer's husband must have been related to her husband's family. Perhaps he was one of the poorer, younger branch. She resolved to lose no time in making inquiries. It would have been a source of greatest pleasure to her if she could have traced the least relationship between her husband and this boy—it might lead to his being adopted by Lord Dynecourt.

So she asked Silvia many puzzling questions, and it was well that she had really never heard her husband mention his family. Lady Clotilde said to her one day :

“It seems strange that your husband should never have mentioned his family or connections to you.”

“It is strange,” said Silvia ; “but it is quite true.”

“I suppose,” continued Lady Clotilde, “that you were all the world to each other?”

“Until I lost him,” said Silvia, “that we most certainly were.”

Lady Dynecourt resolved in her own mind that she would not rest until she had done something worth doing for the beautiful widow and her little boy.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SEARCH.

NOBLE souls are quick to recognize each other. Lady Clotilde Dynecourt had met no one who seemed to her so pleasing, so good, or so noble as this companion of Mrs. Greville's. She knew no one else whose merits seemed to her so great. There was a rectitude of principle, a purity of thought, an innate nobility and grandeur of soul that drew her insensibly, as with the greatest charm.

She enjoyed no society more than that of this simple, beautiful woman, who had educated herself, and whose refinement was one of her greatest charms. She visited constantly at Mrs. Greville's, and the gay widow was not in the least jealous, though she saw plainly that Silvia was the attraction for Lady Dynecourt, and not herself. She would even laugh at it in her good-tempered way, and say :

“Ah ! Silvia, you are just sentimental enough to suit Lady Dynecourt. I am too matter-of-fact for her.”

Lady Dynecourt never seemed to remember the difference in position. She could not have treated Silvia with greater respect and affection had she been her own sister, and Silvia, on her part, was quite as warmly attached to her. They did not seem to weary of each other's society, although they spent many hours together.

As soon as Mrs. Greville's arrangements took a settled shape, Silvia began to make inquiries. She never by any chance heard the name of Rymer. Nor was it likely, she thought to herself, that he would move in such circles. How bitterly she regretted not having asked more about his family or himself !

She had not quite decided what steps to take if she found him. She would only claim the truth. She would compel him to own that the marriage had been valid, and that she was his lawful wife.

With that she would be content; she wanted no more. If he would offer her the wealth of the whole world she would not touch it. She asked nothing from him but justice, and that, for her child's sake, she was determined to have.

Yet there were times when her heart sank at what seemed the useless search. As well seek one particular grain of sand from a crowded beach, as look in England for one man, with no other clew than a name, and that name in all probability an assumed one.

So, while every day of her life she spent two or three hours with his wife, while, without knowing it, she had his name on her lips a dozen times each day, she was wondering when and how to begin her search for him.

"I want nothing from him," she said to herself, over and over again. "I shall never intrude on his presence, but I must, for Cyril's sake, make him do me justice."

She could not account for the idea that had taken possession of her that London was the place to search for him; she could not account for the impression, yet it was strong upon her. One morning an idea suddenly occurred to her that she could look in a London Directory and see if among the "Rymers" there was any one likely to be he. The idea seemed to her almost like an inspiration. An hour after it had first occurred to her, she was standing in a stationer's shop with an open directory before her.

There were many "Rymers," shopkeepers of all kinds—tradesmen, doctors, one clergyman, and one lawyer—"U. Rymer, Thavies' Inn." She laid the book down, for her

trembling hands could not hold it. "U. Rymer." U. was for Ulric, most certainly—then she had found him. It seemed to her most probable that he was a lawyer, though she could not account for the idea.

U. Rymer. Again and again she looked at the name—a thousand doubts, a thousand wishes, a thousand fears coming over her. Nothing could give him back to her, nothing could restore to her the hero of her youth, the love of her girlhood; but she might have justice for herself and her child. She would go, then, and if this U. Rymer should be the man who had married and deserted her, she would claim that justice from him.

She was too purely earnest, too single-minded to have any thought of harm, or to see anything unusual in such a visit; so one morning, when Mrs. Greville was busily engaged with some fashionable friends, Silvia resolved upon the journey. She took a cab, and ordered the driver to take her to Thavies' Inn. She had not much knowledge of London, and had rather expected to find a large, imposing building. It was with something like wonder she gazed at the long, narrow, dark mass of buildings.

"Are you sure," she asked the cabman, "that this is Thavies' Inn?"

He laughed at the surprise so legible on that beautiful face.

"Thavies' Inn, sure enough, miss," he replied; "and not a very cheerful-looking place either."

It did not look to her like a fitting abode for the beauty, luxury-loving U. Rymer she had known—the man who found fault with the hue of a rose if it did not satisfy him, and the light of the stars if he deemed it too pale. Still, she was there, and she resolved to verify her suspicions.

She looked up at the house No. 102—a tall, dark, narrow

tenement, the windows of which had probably not been cleaned for years. The house looked dirty, the stairs were narrow and worn. Her attention was arrested by the names on the door. There was a Mr. Buckthorne, agent for some great pottery establishment ; Mr. Clyne, accountant ; Messrs. Fairbrothers, importers ; Mr. U. Rymer, solicitor. She read no further ; drawing her dress around her, she went up the stairs. Such a staircase !—pieces of paper, string, wisps of hay, all tossing about. Ah, surely Ulric, her refined poet lover, could not live here ; she felt almost ashamed of her expedition and inclined to turn back ; besides which, she was bewildered. Where was the office ?

At that moment a tall, well-dressed man hastened by. Silvia looked at him in such evident distress he stopped abruptly.

“ Can you tell me where I shall find Mr. Rymer’s office ? ” she asked.

“ Rymer’s ? ” he repeated. “ I have just come from there ; the third door to the right on the next floor.”

She went up another flight of stairs, more narrow and more gloomy than the last, and there before her she saw the name that for her had once been woven in magical letters of gold—U. Rymer. The door of the office was closed, and there was no sound.

What lay on the other side ? When that door opened should she see the handsome, patrician face of the man she believed now to be her husband, or would it be the face of a stranger ? Her heart beat so fast as she asked herself the question, that it seemed to her all strength was failing her. That coward fear was useless, she said to herself over and over again, yet she still stood trembling there, uncertain what to do.

Then, with a resolute hand, she knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a strange voice, and Silvia opened the door.

At first a great, red mist lay over everything, and she could distinguish nothing plainly. It faded away, and then Silvia saw a gentleman—a stranger—seated before a small, square table. He looked at the beautiful face in startled wonder.

"I wish to see Mr. Rymer," Silvia said, in a faint, trembling voice.

"I am Mr. Rymer," he replied, rising with a low bow. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"*You* are Mr. Rymer!" she repeated. Ah! no; it was not he. Thank Heaven, it was not *her* Mr. Rymer! She thought to herself that if the well-loved, the well-remembered face had risen before her she should have fallen back dead.

She looked at him steadily; the agitation and emotion died away.

"I have to beg your pardon," she said. "I have made a mistake. I am looking for a Mr. Rymer I knew years ago, and, seeing your address, I ventured to call. I am sorry I have intruded."

A frank, kindly smile answered her—the smile of a kindly, honest man.

"I am very sorry," he said, "that I do not happen to be the Mr. Rymer you are in search of; but I am a lawyer. Is there anything I can do to assist you in your search—any advice that I can offer?"

He placed a chair for her, and his manner was so kind, so respectful, so reassuring, that Silvia took it at once.

"I do not know," she replied, wearily, "that advice can be of any use to me. I lost sight of—of my friend, and the only clew I have is the name—Rymer."

"It is not a common name," said the lawyer.

She looked at him wistfully.

“It is not, and that has made me more hopeful of finding him.”

“There are few Ryimers in London,” he continued; “but the name, as I said before, is a good one.”

Silvia looked at him, her beautiful face wearing its most candid expression.

“I have not thought yet,” she said, “whether I shall seek for help in my search or not. I will think it over and decide. If I decide to ask for help at all, I will come again for yours.”

“And you shall have it,” he replied.

So they parted, each pleased with the other. It was not until she reached home again that Silvia knew how great to her was the relief that in Mr. Rymer, solicitor, she had not found her husband.

CHAPTER LX.

ANXIOUS TO SEE LORD DYNECOURT.

YOU may rely upon one thing, Silvia,” said Lady Dyne-court, “that no true lady, no true wife, no true woman, ever speaks of her husband to a third person. The secrecy of home ought to be honorably kept.”

“I quite agree with you,” replied Silvia.

“I have met ladies—indeed, I meet with them every day—who make their husbands’ faults and peculiarities a common topic of discussion. No matter how clever, how talented, how brilliant they are, when I find that to be the case, I never like them again.”

The two were seated in Mrs. Greville’s boudoir. A warm and sincere attachment had sprung up between them, and

Lady Dynecourt had few greater pleasures in life than her constant intimacy with Silvia.

It was a strange fate that brought them together. Surely a very caricature of fate. A cruel kind of irony that had bound these two in ties of warm and true affection.

The London season was coming to an end now, and, despite Silvia's efforts, she was no nearer finding any traces of her lost husband. She had done all she could, all that the most diligent inquiries could effect, but she had not made the least progress in what had now become to her the great object in her life.

After thinking the matter well over she decided not to seek for legal assistance. If she did that, she would have to part with the secret she had kept so well ; and that was not all, the law was a mighty machine, and, if once set in action, it was impossible to tell when it might stop ; it might even bring down deadly peril on the head of him, whom, despite all, she would have died to save. So she had written a note to the solicitor telling him that she should not require any assistance—a note that he was very sorry to receive, for he had taken a sudden interest in his beautiful visitor.

A blank feeling of despair came over her as the season came to an end, and still she had made no progress. What if it were always so ? What, if despite her thirst for justice, her longing for Cyril's welfare, what if she never found him, never saw him again ? The bare idea turned her head sick and faint with an unutterable dread. What if the knowledge of the validity of her marriage had come too late ?

The world seemed so large, and not only large but so wide, so cold, so cruel, how was she from the thousands of living men to find this one ? Could it be possible that she was to return to Lingholme in the same blank, uncertain

state? Of all things that seemed to her the most unendurable.

As the days passed on the beautiful face lost its color, and a weary, wistful expression came into the sad, sweet eyes. Mrs. Greville noticed it, but said nothing. She had long seen that all such importunities only wearied Silvia. Lady Dynecourt noticed it, and in her sweet, womanly way did her best to cheer and console her.

Several ladies had met accidentally that morning in Mrs. Greville's drawing-room, and Lady Dynecourt was one of them. The conversation had turned upon husbands, their faults and peculiarities, and the best method of management. Mrs. Greville had listened and talked with good-humored cynicism that was natural to her; Lady Dynecourt had preserved a dignified silence that was full of rebuke.

When the conversation became quite distasteful to her, under pretense of looking at some flowers in Mrs. Greville's boudoir, she went there, and Silvia followed her. It was then that Lady Dynecourt uttered the words with which our chapter opens.

Talking of her husband was the last fault that any one could have found with the dignified and noble Lady Clotilde. When she mentioned Lord Dynecourt's name it was always with the greatest respect, a cause of proceeding that led others to respect him. Nor did she scruple to express her opinion pretty candidly of those ladies who betrayed what she called the honorable secrecy of home. That morning many little things had been said that pained her. Lord Dynecourt was still abroad. He had been in Austria several months, on some diplomatic business. At first it was thought that his absence would merely be a matter of a few weeks, but weeks became months, and still he was detained. One or two of

the ladies had, as they thought, very gently and delicately opened Lady Clotilde's eyes by telling her how strange this prolonged absence seemed ; and though each word pierced her heart like the sharpest dagger, she was too proud to answer so much as by a look ; but when she was alone with Silvia her indignation had found vent in words, and then Silvia discovered how deeply and passionately the proud, noble lady loved her husband. Silvia looked at her with unconscious reverence.

“How much I should like to see your husband, Lady Dynecourt,” she said, earnestly.

The noble face softened as the lady asked :

“Why?”

“Because I should so much like to see one who could win such a great love from you. I should imagine him to be a prince among men.”

She did not understand the passing shadow that seemed to linger on Lady Clotilde's face, or the wistful look that was so near akin to tears.

Lady Dynecourt smiled as she replied :

“It is given to some women to love deeply, and to love but once—it was so given to me.”

“But how few, like you,” said the unconscious girl, “find one so entirely worth loving ! I should, indeed, like to see Lord Dynecourt.”

Those few words seemed to draw them even nearer to each other. Any praise, even unconscious, as was Silvia's, given to her idolized husband delighted Lady Dynecourt.

“In all probability,” she said, “your wish will be granted. I have every reason to believe that Lord Dynecourt will be in London in less than three weeks.”

Little did they dream what that coming home would bring

forth. After that conversation they were greater friends than ever. A little event occurred that brought about a confidence between them nothing else could have done.

A Mr. Compton, a distant relative of Lady Clotilde, met Silvia and fell in love with her. He was a gentleman of position, of high character, of good attainments, and of ample fortune, and, moreover, he was so deeply in love with Silvia that he asked for nothing better than to make her his wife. Want of birth, of fortune, was nothing to him; he would have overlooked even greater deficiencies than these to have made the lady he admired so his wife.

Mrs. Greville only smiled when he confided his admiration to her. She had formed a shrewd idea that it would end as all Silvia's love affairs ended—in a blank refusal. But Lady Dynecourt was more sanguine when Mr. Compton confided in her, and asked her to help him—she was delighted.

“It is the very thing I could have wished for,” she said. “I love Mrs. Rymer, and shall be delighted to have her for a relative. I wish you all speed in your love suit.”

“But you will help me,” he said, nervously. “Although I love her so dearly she has never given me the least encouragement; it is like wooing in the dark after all.”

When Lady Clotilde met Silvia the next time she embraced her warmly.

“Are you going to make Mr. Compton very happy, Silvia?” she asked, gently; “you will make me very happy, too.”

But far from looking happy, Silvia seemed greatly distressed. Lady Clotilde spoke earnestly to her.

“Silvia, you will not refuse him, he loves you very much; he would make you very happy; besides—forgive me if I seem selfish—I should have you for a relative then.”

Silvia laid her hand on the arm that embraced her.

“Do you remember, Lady Dynecourt,” she said, “the words you used to me a few days ago—‘it is given to some women to love deeply, and to love but once.’”

“I remember, dear.”

“That is my case. I have no love to give any one.”

Still Lady Clotilde did not look satisfied.

“There must be something allowed for every position,” she said. “Leave love out of the question. You are young and beautiful; you require a protector. You have a dearly-loved child, who will require a stronger hand than yours to guide him as he grows older; be persuaded, Silvia, and, for your boy’s sake, remarry. I love you so, that I should not urge it unless I felt quite sure that it was for your good.”

“I would do almost anything that you urged me to do, Lady Clotilde, but I cannot marry. Nay, do not look so gravely at me. If you will permit me, I will tell you the story of my life.”

CHAPTER LXI.

SILVIA'S CONFIDANTE.

WHILE she lived Silvia never forgot the hour that followed. From the drawing-room came the sound of silvery laughter, the murmur of musical voices, Mrs. Greville’s clearest and most distinct of all. The fragrance of costly exotics seemed to tremble on the air. Just before her, on a small stand, stood a large vase filled with white lilies; and ever afterward the faintest breath of their perfume seemed to bring most vividly before her the noble, earnest face of Lady Clotilde Dynecourt.

"I will tell you the story of my life," she had said, and Lady Clotilde looked at her with an expression of most eager interest.

"Will you, Silvia? You may trust me quite safely. I have loved few as I love you, and I feel that your life holds a romance—I have always thought so."

But Silvia had shrunk back, pale and shuddering. What kind of story was hers to tell to a noble lady, whose pure ears had never been defiled by hearing of the wicked ways of the world? And yet she, in all the pride of her dignity, of her patrician purity, was not more innocent and guiltless than Silvia herself.

"Why should I fear?" she said to herself. "I loved, I trusted, and I was deceived; but I was innocent."

"I see you are half-repenting," said Lady Clotilde. "I would not urge you, but I am a true friend, Silvia, and I should like to know some sensible reason why you will not marry Mr. Compton."

"You shall know," cried Silvia, with sudden passion, "even if in telling you I must lose what I have learned to prize—your good opinion."

"You will never lose *that*," said Lady Clotilde, earnestly; "it is yours for life."

"The reason why I cannot marry Mr. Compton, or any one else," said Silvia, "is that, although I call myself a widow, I believe that my husband is living; and, though I honestly and honorably believe myself to be a true and lawful wife, the man I loved and trusted told me he had betrayed me—that I was not his wife at all."

She spoke hurriedly, with a kind of suppressed passion, as though she half feared the consequences of her words, yet was resolved to utter them.

"I know you will be surprised," she continued, "surprised and shocked, but it is better that you should know the truth at once. I have often wished to tell you. I have often wondered if you would care even ever so little for me if you knew my story."

For all answer, Lady Clotilde bent down and kissed her.

"I could sooner mistake a snowdrop for a poisonous weed than you for aught than the purest and best; to be deceived is a misfortune, not a crime."

Tears filled Silvia's eyes as she listened to the kindly words. How little she who uttered them knew that they were addressed to the victim of the husband she believed and trusted in. She kissed Lady Clotilde's hand in a passion of rapturous gratitude.

"Now I can tell you all," she cried; "and no word of my story has passed my lips before."

Half kneeling, half sitting on the little stool at Lady Clotilde's feet, her hands clasped, her beautiful face raised with an expression of wistful supplication, Silvia told the story of her life. It was like an idyl—a romance. The story of her simple girlish life, passed so happily in the pretty village home; the dawn of that great golden light of love, when her hero first came; the gradual growth of the girlish love into woman's deepest and most passionate idolatry; the marriage in the quiet Scottish manse; the one year of paradise, when earth indeed seemed heaven; the new love and happiness that baby brought with him, and then the cruel awakening—the cruel blow. Lady Clotilde listened intently, her white, jeweled hand resting ever and anon on Silvia's fair head, then touching the beautiful face with caressing fingers.

"It was cruel," she said, in a low, dreamy voice. "It was the most cruel and heartless deed ever done."

"It seemed doubly cruel to me," said Silvia, with a deep, tearless sob; "because it was so totally unexpected. You—if you will pardon my presumption for comparing myself with you—you know how firmly grounded is your faith in your husband and your home—mine was just as firm. You know the terrible anguish and surprise that would be yours now if your husband wrote to you and said your marriage was no marriage. You can imagine what that would be to you. Ah! Lady Clotilde, it was the same to me."

"It would simply have killed me," said Lady Dynecourt; "I should not have survived it one day."

"So I thought," said Silvia, gently; "but Heaven is good, and the love of life is strong. I went out to die—I held that which would have brought me death in my own hands—yet I am here, living, telling you my story, as though it had happened in another life. Shame, anguish, and despair do not always kill."

"You had no warning of what was coming, Silvia?" asked Lady Clotilde.

"No; none. My husband—I shall always give him that title, for he is my husband before Heaven—left me with a smile and a kiss, saying he should return—I remember the words—at five. I waited for him unsuspectingly, as you await the return of your husband now, and I have never seen him since. The letter was brought to me, and it drove me mad."

"It was most heartless, most cruel," said Lady Dynecourt. "Why, Silvia, he who could act so cruelly is not worth sorrow or regret; he is worthy of nothing save contempt."

"I cannot help loving him," she said, gently. "I try to despise him, but I cannot, because—I think it is because I loved him once so very dearly. I try to say to myself, how

despicable, how cruel, how selfish he was, but some still small voice in my heart always pleads for him. He was Cyril's father, and I cannot forget that."

"And have you never heard anything from him or about him?"

"No; I have done my best. For some long time after that cruel letter I was like one stunned by a violent blow—I could not even think clearly—and no doubt as to the truth of what he had said entered my mind. Years afterward, and then quite accidentally, by a chain of circumstances which I need not stop to explain, led to my finding out that he had deceived me; that my marriage, according to the Scotch law, was perfectly legal and valid; and that if I chose to make my claim, he would be obliged to own that I was his lawful wife. It is not altogether for my own sake that I would seek justice, but for Cyril's; it will make such a difference to my boy."

"You would do very wrong not to urge it, Silvia," said Lady Dynecourt, so unconscious—Heaven help her!—of what her own fate would be if that claim were allowed, "not only for Cyril's sake, but for your own; it is monstrous that a young life like yours should be so cruelly blighted. You are bound in honor and in conscience to do the best you can for yourself."

"I loved him so dearly," said the girl, unconsciously, "that it seems to me I have no self left—it would only be for Cyril's sake."

"Then," said Lady Clotilde, "for Cyril's sake why not do it?"

"For the simple reason that I cannot find him," said Silvia. "Nor do I know what steps to take in order to find him. I might, perhaps, obtain some clew if I could make my story known; but that, for his sake, I would never do."

"You are weak," said Lady Clotilde, impetuously. "Such conduct as his to you should not go unpunished. You do wrong to all womankind when you pass it over in silence and oblivion. Perhaps if men were more often held up to public scorn for such cowardly actions, there would be fewer of them."

"I could not punish him," replied Silvia, "I who loved *him* so dearly could not be the one to bring retribution on him."

"What rank—what position did he hold in life, Silvia?" asked Lady Dynecourt.

"I cannot tell. When one has been deceived, it is difficult to believe anything. Now that I know more of the world, I am inclined to think he must have belonged to the higher class—a class that can afford to gratify every whim. I have grown wiser since the days when I thought my village home the fairest under the sun; knowledge does not always bring happiness."

A strong impulse urged Lady Dynecourt to ask if she thought Rymer an assumed name, but she repressed it, not liking to ask any information that Silvia did not voluntarily give to her.

"You have had excellent opportunities for seeing most of the *habitubs* of the great world," she said, thoughtfully; "among them, have you seen no one who reminds you of him?"

"No," replied Silvia; "he was as superior to every one I have seen as the sun is to the stars."

Lady Dynecourt smiled faintly.

"You loved him well, and the glamour of love is upon you still," she said.

But Silvia, looking earnestly at her, said :

“Lady Dynecourt, you have not the legal knowledge of a clever lawyer, but you have the instinct of a noble and true lady ; will you answer me one question ?”

“Yes,” was the quiet reply ; “that I will, if it be in my power.”

CHAPTER LXII.

A WIFE'S DECISION.

SILVIA paused for one half-minute. She had felt some suspense before the counsel's reply had reached her, but she felt greater suspense now. A lawyer she felt might be mistaken, but a noble and honorable woman never could be. One like Lady Dynecourt, whose heart, mind, and soul were naturally noble, delicate, and refined, would have a quicker, keener, surer insight into things than mere legal men could ever give. She felt, therefore, as if her fate, her future, her fortune, her life, were to be directed, when she looked up into Lady Clotilde's face, and said :

“Will you tell me your own, honest, unbiassed opinion, whether you think my marriage legal or not?”

“If you will tell me all the details, you shall have my earnest and unbiassed opinion. I know little or nothing of what constitutes the marriage of any country, but I think, in common with every one else, I know what constitutes a marriage before God and man.”

Silvia then related every detail—the honest, good faith in which she herself was married, the ceremony that took place, even the names of the witnesses. She omitted not one detail, and Lady Clotilde, little, ah ! little dreaming upon whom she sat in judgment, said :

"Your marriage I should consider as legal and binding as though it had been celebrated in an English cathedral before thousands of people."

"If *you* say so, no doubt shall ever cross my mind again," cried Silvia.

"I do say so. I believe you are a wife, even as I believe I am one myself; and, Silvia, you should not be content to remain quiet; for the sake of religion and morality you should take some steps. Only think how horrible it would be if the man who is absolutely your husband should marry again!"

Silvia's face grew pale.

"It may even be so," continued Lady Dynecourt; "then think what shame and sorrow would fall on innocent heads. You must avert what evil you can, Silvia. Have you any idea as to whether he would think of marrying again?"

A vague, distressed expression came over the beautiful face.

"Your question gives me many anxious thoughts," she replied. "When that cruel letter of his came it drove me mad. And afterward, when I tried to recall every word, I found that I could not do so—it seems to me like a dream. There are times when I fancy that he said he was going to England to marry some lady in his own rank of life; then again I think it must be a fevered fancy. If it were really so, Lady Clotilde, and I made his fault known, I should place him in the hard, cruel clutches of the law."

"Then you would do right; the law was made for such offenders. You must think of others, Silvia. If he is married, then there is some one else most cruelly deceived; some one else who thinks herself a wife, and who is after all no wife. The consequences of one sin are terrible and never-ending."

"Yes, I could not punish him," said Silvia, musingly. "I think, I do not say I am sure, but I think that if I were to meet him again, even if he had wife and children by his side, I could only forgive him. I have borne the bitterness of death, I think. Oh, Lady Dynecourt—do not say I am weak and foolish—I think I should bury my wrongs in my own heart, and let him pass on. If I know myself, I could never bring on another the same unhappiness I have felt myself."

"We shall not agree, Silvia," said Lady Dynecourt. "I like right at any cost. I would do right, no matter what it cost me."

"Ah, but, Lady Clotilde, if he should have now the love of another woman, if he should have made another his wife. Think what she must suffer if he were punished and his crime brought to light."

"Certainly she must suffer. *You* suffered, did you not? But, supposing her to be a good and true woman, do you think she would thank you for the weakness that allows her to keep a position at once so false and so degrading?"

"I do not know," said the gentle voice. "It would be hard to bear."

Lady Clotilde raised her head with a lofty pride that was natural to her.

"I know, speaking for myself," she said, "that I would rather bear any suffering than be deceived. That I could not bear. The position of a person deceived on any vital point always seems to me more or less contemptible. Give me truth, no matter what goes with it."

"But such suffering as that, Lady Clotilde."

"Better ten thousand times to be endured than that deception should be continued. I put myself in the place of such a woman. Do you know what I should do, Silvia?"

"Something noble and grand, I am sure," said Silvia, with admiring eyes.

"I should recognize my position at once. I should go to the man I had believed to be my husband. I should say to him: 'Before God and man, your faith and truth belong to the woman you married in Scotland, and even though my heart break, I bid you farewell forever.'"

"Would you really do that?" asked Silvia.

"Undoubtedly. I would not remain under his roof or bear his name one hour after I knew such a truth."

Silvia sighed deeply.

"I am not so brave or so strong as you," she said. "You are the noblest lady I have ever met. And, oh! Lady Dyncourt, is it possible that you will care for me as much, now you know my story, as you did before?"

Lady Clotilde smiled.

"I shall care for you even more, my dearest Silvia; but I shall never cease urging you the need of seeking justice. Now I hear Mrs. Greville's visitors going. How long I have been here! Silvia, my husband is coming home, as I told you, very soon, and I am having the picture gallery and the drawing-rooms redecorated. Will you come and give me the benefit of your good advice? Mrs. Greville tells me you were quite famous in Rome for your great artistic taste."

Silvia glanced with a sky-bright smile at the noble face.

"I do not think that I ever was or ever shall be famous," she said. "I am only a wayside flower; but I cannot tell you how much pleasure it will give me to help you."

"Before Lord Dyncourt left England," continued Lady Clotilde, "he sat to Winterbetter for his portrait; it has not been sent home yet, but I hope it will come before my lord

himself. I have had all the pictures re-arranged, so as to give it the best place in the gallery. Why are you smiling, Silvia?"

"Because it makes my very heart glad to hear you," she replied; "it is like listening to the sweetest music. Do you know, Lady Clotilde, that you are the first happy wife I have known; you are the first who has spoken happily of love—husband and home—that is why I would sooner hear you than listen to the sweetest music in the world."

Lady Clotilde connected a sigh with a smile.

"You have seen the darkest side of life. Certainly there may be a happier experience in store for you; it is not impossible that you may be on the list of happy wives yourself. Never despair. Then you will come to me to-morrow? I shall ask Mrs. Greville if she can spare you for some few days."

"That will be quite a pleasure to look forward to," said Silvia, more brightly than Lady Clotilde had ever heard her speak yet; and so with kindly words they parted.

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN HER HUSBAND'S HOME.

MRS. GREVILLE smiled when Lady Dynecourt made her request.

"Spare Mrs. Rymer for a whole week?" she said; "we have not been parted for a week since she came to live with me. I cannot refuse you, but I shall be sorely puzzled."

While to Silvia herself, the fact of her spending an entire week with one whom she loved so entirely, and esteemed perhaps more highly than any other, was to her like a glimpse

of Paradise. She prepared for her visit with a face of such rapturous happiness, that Mrs. Greville pretended to feel jealous over her decided preference.

"You really ought to pretend to be sorry to leave me, Silvia," she said; "after living so long together you are bound to love me."

Silvia laughed, and it was almost the first time during those years that Mrs. Greville had heard the sound of that full, rich, silvery laugh. She looked up in amaze.

"Your laughter is like a chime of silvery bells, Silvia," she said; "how is it that I have never heard it before?"

"You have been very good to me," said Silvia, gratefully, "and I am sorry to leave you—even were it only for one day. But the idea of you with the world at your feet being jealous of me amuses me."

"It is fortunate for me that Lady Dynecourt has a husband; if she had not she would never let you return; but, Silvia," continued Mrs. Greville, with more emotion than she was accustomed to display, "you will always remember that whatever good or ill betides you, your home is here with me."

And then, with these words ringing in her ears, Silvia set out for the home that should by right have been her own—the home where the grand tragedy of her life was to be enacted.

It was a strange, grim, bitter fate that led her there—the house where the man she loved had spent the half of his life—where every picture, every work of art was in some way connected with him—where his feet for many years had trod—the home that was associated with all his past, and where his future was to be even more tragical.

No suspicion of the truth ever dawned upon her as she entered Dynewold House; no faint shadow of what was loom-

ing over her ; no idea, even ever so remote, that she was for the first time entering the house that, if justice had been done to her, should have been entirely her own. Lady Dynecourt met her in that magnificent entrance hall, where royal princes had looked around in admiration—where luxury and art seemed to reign supreme. She thought to herself that if magnificence could bring happiness it must surely be found there. Lady Dynecourt smiled half sadly as she noted that look.

“Is this your *first* visit to Dynewold House?” she asked of Silvia. “How strange that I should have known and loved you, yet that you should not have visited me before.”

She called no servant, but took Silvia up the broad, beautiful staircase to her room. She said, in her gentle voice :

“See, I have chosen a pretty room for you, quite close to my own. Oh ! Silvia, I wish—oh ! I wish that you were never going to leave me again.”

“Surely *you* do not require a companion,” said Silvia, laughingly. “I should find amusement enough in simply looking around me.”

Then the sad, half wistful expression she had noticed so often came again over Lady Clotilde's face.

“My husband is very kind,” she said, “my home very beautiful, but, Silvia—Silvia, do you not understand the silence here is never broken by the sound of a child's voice, or the least sunny gleam of laughter ; there is no pretty face to make sunshine. I *should* be happy if Heaven in its goodness had given to me one little child, only one, for my husband to have loved, and to have looked upon as his heir. Silvia, no silence seems to me half so sad, so cold, so lonely as the silence of a great house where there is no child.”

Then, after a few minutes, she shook off the profound silence that had fallen over her.

"Come with me to the picture gallery," she said; "the men are busy at work."

Dynewold House was not gaudy; the decorations were magnificent, but they were all in the most subdued and perfect taste—the most perfect harmony. There was nothing that gave any one the idea of novelty. It was the house of generations; the art treasures accumulated there bore the mark of many centuries; it was that very idea of ancient grandeur that caused it to look so different to everything Silvia had ever seen before. One part of the picture gallery was already completed. Lady Dynecourt's taste was too perfect to allow her to bring into that home of the arts anything that was not in keeping with its character. The pictures were mellowed with time, and the statues were beautiful copies of the great masterpieces of the world; the recesses in the walls were filled with stands of costly exotics; a rich crimson carpet covered the oaken boards; the light that came through the windows was modulated by the artistically-constructed blinds. Silvia uttered a cry of admiration as she entered the place, and Lady Dynecourt's fair face lighted up with an expression of eager delight.

"Do you think he will like it?" she cried with the impetuosity of a child.

For one moment Silvia had forgotten the absent husband.

"He!—who?—Lord Dynecourt? I should think he will be delighted," she hastened to reply.

Then Lady Clotilde took her hand and led her to a beautiful little alcove, where there was space sufficient for a large picture.

"This is the spot where my husband's portrait is to hang," she said; "and, Silvia, do you know that last night, as I walked here alone in the twilight, a strange kind of half-vision came to me. Shall I tell you what it was?"

The profound melancholy tone struck dismay into Silvia's heart; what right had this favorite of fortune—this beloved child, this loved wife, this proud, beautiful, high-bred woman—what right had she with melancholy?

“Yes, tell me,” she replied; “happy people never have visions.”

“Do they not? Well, my vision was this: I saw my husband's portrait hanging there—the handsome, smiling face that I loved so dearly—and I saw the pictured face of another woman hanging by his side—not *my* face; and then it seemed to me that, though I had been long dead, I hovered there, a gray, silent shadow—unseen by any one—still loving the handsome face that hung on the wall. It was a strange fancy, Silvia.”

“Nothing but a fancy, though, Lady Clotilde, that came from the twilight and the shadows; it was nothing more.”

“I know you are right; yet it took a strange hold of me, and it has left an impression on my mind that I shall die soon.”

“It is nothing but nervousness,” said Silvia, earnestly; “and I have always heard the most painful shape nervous disease ever takes is that of a constant troubling, intangible, groundless fear of death.”

Lady Clotilde's face brightened.

“Is it a common thing?” she said. “Ah! then I am glad I told you. I was afraid, thinking you would laugh at me. I began to think my picture gallery haunted.”

“I hope it will be haunted by bright, happy, loving thoughts, and beautiful associations,” said Silvia, with a low, sweet laugh, and then together they looked at the pictures.

There were gems by the ancient masters, pictures by

modern artists; but what interested Silvia were the grand old family portraits, the warriors, the statesmen, the men who had done good service to king and country.

"There is a strange resemblance in all these faces," she said, thoughtfully; "it is easy to see they are all men of the same race."

"Yes; and the features, the brow, the eyes, the lips seem to descend from father to son. The Dynecourts have always been considered a very handsome race."

"There is something to me strangely familiar in the faces, too," continued Silvia. "I could fancy that I had known them all."

And so, unconsciously, she—the mother of the true heir of that noble race—walked among the silent and illustrious dead. Once she was almost startled. A picture of three children, a family group, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, stood against the wall. Lady Clotilde was speaking to one of the workmen, and Silvia turned it round to the light, wondering what it was. A cry of surprise rose to her lips, but she stifled it.

The boy, the center figure of the group, was the image, the very picture of little Cyril.

The impulse was strong upon her to call Lady Clotilde's attention to it, but remembering how sensitive she was, she forbore. She replaced the painting, but she could not drive the wonder and surprise from her heart.

Was it merely accidental, this likeness between her boy and the heir of Dynecourt, who had lived so long ago? Was it accidental? Of course it could be nothing else. But why was it—how could it be?

Not even the faintest suspicion of the truth dawned across her; the faintest foreshadowing of the truth never occurred to

her. Her heart was full of silent wonder, and more than once that same evening she stole away in the dim twilight to look again upon the face that was so like her beloved and only child.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A FEARFUL RETRIBUTION.

AN interruption to the train of thought came on the day following. Among Clotilde's friends she numbered a Mrs. Lowe, a pretty, fashionable, clever woman, whose society was always eagerly sought after. Lady Clotilde liked her, and though she had given orders that she was to be denied to visitors during the next few days, she was always "at home" to Mrs. Lowe.

It was a bright, beautiful morning; Lady Clotilde was busily engaged in correcting the proofs of a new catalogue of pictures; Silvia was writing the invitations for a grand dinner party, to be given on the day after Lord Dynecourt's return. The summer sunshine filled the room, the air was odorous with the sweet breath of flowers, when Mrs. Lowe was announced. Lady Clotilde looked up with a smile.

"Always welcome, Mrs. Lowe," she said, and the visitor's pretty face brightened and beamed with delight at the words. After some few preliminary remarks, she cried:

"Lady Clotilde, do you remember a very beautiful woman we met last year occasionally in society—a Madame Faiteuil. *You* never liked her, and declined an introduction."

"I remember," said Lady Clotilde; "but I have seen nothing of her this year."

"No; she has been living in seclusion. You will be interested to know she is married to-day."

"Married!" cried Lady Clotilde. "No one can say now that courage is extinct among our gentlemen. Who has been found brave enough to undertake the destiny of Madame la Baronne?"

"That is the strangest part of the story. Do you remember meeting at Lady Bille's a pretty, sad, half-frightened looking woman—a Mrs. Thornton?"

"Yes; and I read of her death soon afterward."

"Mr. Thornton, the widower, is the happy man. He marries Madame la Baronne at Hanover Square this morning. The marriage is being celebrated even now, while I am speaking."

Silvia's face flushed with hot indignation. Poor heart-broken wife! poor, unhappy, wretched lady! so slowly, so cruelly murdered. It seemed to her but yesterday that she had stood trembling and half-frightened by that solitary death-bed; the pale, dying face seemed to rise before her; the faint voice, with its terrible threat, sounded again in her ears:

"I shall not rest in my grave—I cannot rest—I must see him again. I must look once more upon his face!"

Would that threat be realized? Would that restless, loving, unhappy spirit revisit this world for the purpose of looking once more upon the face of the man she had loved so devotedly—the man who had destroyed her? A cold shudder of dread seized her, even her lips grew white.

"What is the matter, Silvia?" asked Lady Clotilde, in alarm.

"I knew Mrs. Thornton," she replied, "and I am shocked. I used to live with her."

Both ladies looked at her in wonder.

"I had forgotten that if I ever heard it," said Lady Clotilde.

Mrs. Lowe was too well-bred to make any inquiries.

"I beg your pardon," she said ; "I was not aware of it. I knew not that you would be pained at what I said."

"It does not surprise me," replied Silvia. "I have always expected to hear of that marriage, sooner or later. Does Mr. Thornton still reside at Cleve House?"

"Yes ; and a series of most brilliant entertainments are to follow the marriage. 'The happy couple,' as the papers say, are going to the Isle of Wight for a week only ; then they take a very determined plunge into gay life, and we may expect Mrs. Thornton to be one of our leading belles."

"I shall never either receive or visit her," said Lady Clotilde, gently. "I did not like her at first, and am not likely to change my opinion."

It was a shock to Silvia, although she had always known that sooner or later the marriage would take place. Indeed, it had been a matter of surprise to her that she had not heard of it before. Mrs. Lowe went away, leaving Silvia overshadowed by the memory of the tragedy that she had been learning to forget.

A few days afterward and all London was shocked by the rumor of a terrible occurrence at Cleve House. At the clubs and the drawing-rooms people talked of nothing else. Hundreds congregated to look at the exterior of the house where so unusual a scene had taken place ; the illustrated papers had pictures of Cleve House on the front page. Men met each other, and said :

"This is a queer story about Thornton."

Ladies grew pale at the mention of the name.

Better to tell in our own words what happened. Newspaper reports varied, although the substance was the same. We have no precise explanation to give. Whether in punishment of what was in reality a cold, cruel, heartless murder, the spirit of the injured woman was allowed to revisit the world, or whether remorse played upon a guilty mind and filled it with shadows, who shall say? But this was the fate of Mr. Thornton.

The gorgeous wedding breakfast was given at Cleve House. Madame la Baronne had furnished apartments, where it was quite impossible that any ceremony of the kind could take place. Therefore, by Mr. Thornton's wish and desire, the breakfast was given at his mansion.

Such a breakfast! Gunter had provided it. Weippart's band was engaged. Half the *elite* of London gathered in those gorgeous apartments; the luxury and magnificence displayed were regal. Mrs. Thornton, beautiful as a vision, received the congratulations of the guests. Her toilette was something that must be seen in order to be understood; the "sheen of satin, the glimmer of pearls," all that luxury and art could suggest, had been brought to aid her loveliness; and Mr. Thornton looked more than proud of his peerless bride.

The carriage for the happy pair was ordered at three o'clock. Mrs. Thornton withdrew to change her dress; Mr. Thornton went into his own room for some few minutes' preparation before his journey. His valet followed him to the door.

"I shall not want you, Adolphe," he said. "See that my dressing-case is put into the carriage."

Humming to himself a popular air from a well-known opera, Mr. Thornton entered his room and closed the door. The bride descended, the carriage drove up to the door; in the streets outside a crowd of people gathered to witness the

departure. Brilliantly-dressed wedding guests and obsequious servants surrounded the bride, yet no bridegroom appeared.

"Mr. Thornton is in his room," said the valet, in answer to some question.

The pause became embarrassing.

"Tell your master I'm ready," said Mrs. Thornton, imperiously.

Then Adolphe went to his master's room, and a loud cry of dismay rang through the house. One looked at another without speaking. What could be the matter; what had gone wrong? What was that terrible cry ringing through the house, blanching blooming faces, and causing strong men to look at each other in wondering fear?

"Something wrong in Mr. Thornton's room!"

Who said the words first, and what did they mean? One or two of his most intimate friends went up stairs, followed the servants into the room, and there beheld a sight that might have struck terror even into stouter hearts than theirs.

On a chair, huddled into a frightened, confused mass, sat the bridegroom, a crouching, gibbering idiot, pointing with his finger to a chair that his first wife had been accustomed to use.

"Take that woman away," he cried, with chattering teeth; "take her away. There are worms on her shroud; she is pointing at me. There is a stain of blood over her heart; take her away."

"There is no woman," said one, trying to pacify him.

"She is there—my wife. They said I broke her heart. She said unless I bade her good-by she should come back to look once again at me. I have been expecting her every hour since she died; she has come at last. On my wedding day—my wedding day—and there she sits, with her dead eyes

on my face. Take her away; great Heaven! take her away."

It was useless trying to soothe him; he was raving mad. Doctors came and prescribed for him. Wonder, dismay, fear, horror, took the place of feasting and mirth. Such a tragedy had never happened within the memory of man. From one terrible convulsion he fell into another, until the frenzy of madness could go no further, and then, under careful restraint, he was removed.

It was some time before they dare break the intelligence to the proud, beautiful woman he had married. She heard it with a stern, proud face, to all appearance unmoved; but there can be no doubt that in the righteous retribution that had overtaken him she saw how justly he was punished for his sin.

Instead of a gay and gallant bridegroom there was a helpless idiot, frightened at imaginary voices, at shadowy faces—frightened at the specters his own guilty conscience called forth—idiocy alternating with the most terrible frenzy of madness.

His wife took possession of his fortune and estate, and he was seen by the great world no more; the heavy iron gates of the asylum closed behind him, and he passed them never again.

CHAPTER LXV.

LORD DYNECOURT'S RETURN.

MY lady, his lordship has arrived, and is in the library." They were very common words, uttered by an important-looking footman, who evidently understood that the coming home of his lord would be a great event for his lady.

Lady Clotilde was seated with Silvia in a pretty little morning room ; they were both engaged with a parcel of new books when the man entered with his message. Lord Dynecourt had not been expected until evening. If Silvia had never known or even suspected how dearly his wife loved him, she knew it then by the thrill of delight that seemed for one moment to unnerve her, by the warm flush that rose to the beautiful, noble face, by the sudden light that came into her eyes, by the trembling of the white hands. She laid the books down, and, with a low cry, rose from her seat.

“He is come !” she said, and Silvia never forgot the tone of her voice—it was as though all Paradise had suddenly opened before her.

The next moment she had quitted the room, and Silvia was alone.

Silvia’s thoughts were not all sad ones. Her experience of the world had been so sad, her experience of married life so unhappy, that it was something new to see a wife who was happy in her husband’s love.

“She must be happy,” thought Silvia, “although she has no children, and her face is at times so sad ; she must be happy, she loves him so dearly.”

Then again the pitiful story of Mrs. Thornton came to her mind. It is not sufficient for happiness that a woman should give her whole heart and soul in fondest and most worshiping love, else that poor lady would have lived, not died ; there must be some return, something for that love to cling to, or it feeds on the heart that cherishes it, leaving that heart to die.

Lord Dynecourt must love this woman, who was so noble, so beautiful, and so superior ; and, as she sat there, Silvia began to wonder what he was like. Handsome, his wife said, kind,

generous, indulgent. Was he noble in heart and soul, as his wife was?

Then it suddenly occurred to Silvia that her visit to Dynewold House ought to end ; she had only been asked there during its master's absence.

"Lady Clotilde will have no time for me," she thought ; "now all her time and attention must be given to her husband. I shall tell her that I ought to return to Mrs. Greville to-day."

She was so humble, so unobtrusive, that she never thought of remaining now that the lordly master of the house had returned ; she never dreamed that her sweet and gracious presence was always delightful to Lady Clotilde ; all she thought was Lady Clotilde's husband had come back and there was no further need for her. She had ended her duties and could return home. She sat still in the pretty morning room ; it was not likely that Lord Dynecourt would go there ; it was a room reserved purposely for the ladies of the house.

Two hours at least passed before Lady Clotilde returned, and then her face, her manner were so changed that Silvia hardly knew her. She looked brighter, younger, fairer than she had ever done. Silvia looked up with a smile as the high-born, patrician lady stooped and clasped her arms around her neck.

"I know what that means," said Silvia, laughingly ; "you are so happy that your happiness overflows, and you would fain give some of it to me."

"You are right," said Lady Clotilde. "I am very happy."

She did not add that her happiness was caused entirely by her husband's kindness. She did not tell Silvia that her heart had fluttered like that of a young dreaming girl when her

husband kissed her face more lovingly than he had ever done for years, and said :

“Why, Clotilde, a quiet life suits you. I never saw you looking so beautiful or so well.”

“Even though you have been away from me,” she said. “Then my face is false to my heart, for I have wearied inexpressibly for you.”

Perhaps her words touched him, for he held her caressingly in his arms, placing her on a couch, and taking a seat by her side.

“I am so glad to be at home again, Clotilde. I was getting quite tired ; and in all Austria I have not seen a face like yours.”

“You are really glad to see me then, Basil ; and you will not leave me so long again ?”

“No,” he replied, thoughtfully. “They are anxious for me to return—in fact, Lord S—— has made me a very magnificent proposition, but I shall not accept it. I prefer home and my wife.”

Those few words had made her quite happy ; but she did not repeat them to Silvia. She rarely spoke of her own feelings or emotions. Her happiness was to be read in her shining eyes, her smiling lips, her brightened face.

“I have been telling Lord Dynecourt about you, Silvia,” she said ; “how fortunate I have been in finding a friend so lovable. He is quite anxious to see you.”

“I hope Lord Dynecourt is well,” said Silvia, half shyly.

She felt in some awe of this great nobleman.

“He is well, and he is so pleased with the picture gallery. Ah, Silvia, I am more than a thousand times repaid for my trouble ; the only annoyance is that the portrait did not come first.”

"Dear Lady Clotilde," said Silvia, quietly, "I have been so happy with you—so happy to have been even the least service to you ; but now that Lord Dynecourt has returned, I must go ; Mrs. Greville is all alone. I thought, if you were willing, I would go to-night."

Lady Clotilde laughed aloud. It was the happiest and sweetest peal of laughter that Sylvia ever heard from her lips.

"My dearest Silvia," she said, "you will pardon me ; do nothing of the kind. Lord Dynecourt desires to see you. I have been telling him about Cyril. I was so pleased to excite his interest in him. It is in Lord Dynecourt's power to advance so materially your boy's interests in life. Ah, me ! if he had but a son of his own !—like yours."

They knew so little, either of them—Heaven help them !—of the truth.

"Of course," continued Lady Clotilde, "if you really prefer going home, I must be content. Nor must I forget how kind Mrs. Greville has been to me ; but stay here to-night, Silvia. You must not run away the same day Lord Dynecourt returns."

"I will stay, with pleasure, if you are quite sure that I shall not be in the way. That was my great dread."

Lady Clotilde laughed again.

"There is not much fear. Lord Dynecourt has given orders that he shall be denied to all visitors to-day ; and this evening, when we are quite alone, you shall tell him all about Cyril. Who knows, under such auspices as my lord's, he may rise to be prime minister some day ?"

Silvia kissed the kindly hands clasping hers.

"I have never spoken to you on the subject before," continued Lady Clotilde, "but I may as well tell you now that, if you are willing, Silvia, I shall make your boy's future my

care. I have more money than I know what to do with. I should like to send him to college, and have him brought up in some profession. He is so clever, he will soon make his way."

"I do not know how to thank you," she said. "I cannot thank you, but I pray Heaven to reward you."

"That is settled then," said Lady Clotilde, gayly, "and we shall spend a pleasant evening. Lord Dynecourt took luncheon when he arrived, so that we shall not meet again until dinner-time. My husband is in his study—the house steward is with him, and I have an engagement. How shall you amuse yourself, Silvia?"

"I shall do nothing but think of you and your kindness," she replied. "Oh! Lady Clotilde, I am so grateful to you; I am at a loss how to thank Heaven for having found me such a friend."

Lady Clotilde laid her gentle hand on the fair, bowed head.

"You have had sorrow enough in your brief life," she said. "I am pleased that I can help to make you happier."

Then she went away, leaving Silvia more happy, more grateful than words can tell. She went to the dining-room, where lunch was prepared, and then hesitated as to how she should spend the afternoon.

A sudden thought struck her. Lady Clotilde had purchased a quantity of photographs, and had expressed a wish as to their arrangement.

"I shall just have time to do them," she thought.

They were on the table of a pretty boudoir that opened into the drawing-room, a pretty, cozy little nook, not much used, except when Lady Clotilde had visitors. It was divided from the suite of drawing-rooms by a beautiful little arch, and rich hangings of blue velvet.

As Silvia sat down to the table, she smiled to herself, thinking how silent those magnificent rooms were. Lady Clotilde was out, Lord Dynecourt engaged—it seemed as though she had the whole of that immense house to herself.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE MAN WHO BETRAYED HER.

THE photographs were very beautiful. When she came to one representing scenes in France or Italy, she lingered over it; but when it was of a Scotch mountain or lake, those wild, weird hills, all covered with heather, there rose before her that home where her one brief life had been spent—the calm, shining lake, the purple, sloping hills, the old gray church, the sunlit garden, the pretty home—she heard the servant's voice, she saw her husband's face, and a low cry of anguish came from her lips.

“Shall I never be able to forget?” she cried. “Oh, bonnie Scotland! even your name, even the sight of the heather and the blue hills, is full of anguish for me!”

Then she stifled the sob that rose to her lips, for the drawing-room door opened, and a strange gentleman entered, ushered in by a footman.

“Tell Lord Dynecourt I will not detain him longer than five minutes,” said the stranger to the servant; “but my business is important.”

Silvia looked at the hangings; they were drawn almost close.

“There is no need for me to go away,” she said; “I can take the little stand to the window, where I can neither see nor hear.”

She carried the stand to the window, and continued her occupation, arranging and numbering the photographs, without giving even a thought to the gentlemen in the next room.

How long she had been dreaming over those pictures—how long that conversation in the drawing-room had lasted, she knew not; it was the sound of a voice that roused her.

A voice that made the warm blood in her veins freeze and stand still—a voice that seemed to paralyze even her very heart and stop its beating—that brought great drops of anguish to her brow—that made her fall on her knees, with clenched hands, and wide-open, wild eyes. What was it?

The voice of the man she had loved so dearly—the voice that had wooed her in such soft, honeyed accents in the green lanes of Rosebank—the voice that had opened all Paradise to her—that had whispered to her of love and poetry—that had lured her from home, and had never addressed her save in terms of love and tenderness.

“What is it?” she cried. “Ah! great Heaven! What does that sound mean?”

So she knelt, with wild, imploring eyes, and outstretched arms. There was no mistake; it was richer, deeper, fuller, more manly in tone, but it was as surely the voice of the man she believed to be her husband as she was kneeling there.

She must see—she must see for herself if sound or fancy had misled her. She must see what face went with that voice—to whom it belonged.

Gently and slowly she rose from her knees; she touched the velvet hangings, and they parted half an inch; she looked, with wild, wondering, wistful eyes, and saw two gentlemen—one, quite a stranger to her, talking earnestly, evidently a visitor; the other, leaning in a careless, graceful attitude against the richly-carved mantelpiece, evidently the master of

the house, was the man who had betrayed her—the man who, calling himself Ulric Rymer, had married her !

For some few moments it seemed to her as if life itself must leave her—that even as she stood there she must die.

She was looking again on the face that had been all the world to her. Those lips had kissed her a thousand times ; those eyes had looked into hers with love unutterable ; it was the face she had worshiped as the morning star of her life—that face that had been her light, her sunshine.

It was the man she had loved with the deepest, truest love of her heart—the husband of her girlhood, the father of her child.

And who was he? What gulf lay between them ?

Slowly the blue curtain fell from her hands ; it was but as though a breath of wind had moved it ; no one noticed it ; and then she tried to regain her seat. She had seen enough ; but the strength had all left her ; the coldness and numbness of death seemed to have fallen over her ; she had not the power to stir.

White, ghastly, cold, she stood, while the deep, rich voice and musical laugh still sounded near her.

Who was he? The beloved husband of her dearest friend—the husband whom Lady Clotilde loved with her whole heart—the rich, powerful, mighty Lord Dynecourt—a peer of the realm, master of that magnificent mansion ! Yet, surely as Heaven was above her, her true, lawful husband, the father of her child !

Her child ! Those two words seemed to pierce her heart with a burning pain, a wild wonder if she were not mad or dreaming. If Ulric Rymer were indeed before her, then *she*, not Lady Clotilde, was the true Lady Dynecourt, and Cyril—the child without a name—over whose fate she had mourned, was the true heir to that great princely race.

She tried, even as she stood there, to think it over calmly. She might as well have tried to stop, with her two little hands, the courses of a raging torrent. Her brain burned; that well-remembered voice seemed to be filling her ears with the strangest sound; a thick mist was spreading before her eyes a chill like that of death was shooting through her veins.

Like a clear sounding bell these words came to her:

“If I am his wife, what is Lady Clotilde?”

Lady Clotilde, whose life was bound in his! Horror, fear, confusion, dismay, seemed to spread on every side of her. If her white lips could have moved it would have been to have moaned aloud in her misery; but the power of speech, as of movement, had gone from her.

As she stood, so she fell; the mist had blinded her, the chill had paralyzed her; she fell like one dead.

The two gentlemen were exchanging adieus, they were deeply interested in talking, and did not notice the slight sound; no one entered the room, no one missed her until Lady Clotilde returned, and her first question was for Mrs. Rymer.

Then, after some delay, they found her lying in that pretty, silent room, like one dead. Lady Clotilde gave a cry of dismay.

“She’s dead!” said one of the servants; but Lady Clotilde placed her hand on Silvia’s heart.

“She has swooned, she is not dead,” she said. “Carry her gently to her room and lay her on the bed.”

So, when Silvia opened her eyes again, it was to see Lady Clotilde’s kind face bent with unutterable anxiety over her.

“Are you better, Silvia? You have been very ill,” said the sweet voice.

“I must go home,” she cried, wildly; “I am ill. Oh!

Lady Clotilde, do not detain me—I shall die if I am kept here—let me go home.”

Lady Clotilde looked as she felt—bewildered.

“My dearest Silvia, what is the matter? You frighten me. Certainly you shall go home, if you wish. What has made you so ill? I cannot understand.”

But all the reply made to her was the one wild, pitiful cry :

“Let me go home, let me go home.”

“It is a bad hysterical attack,” said the doctor, who had been summoned; “and, Lady Dynecourt, I think the best plan will be to comply with the patient’s request and let her go home.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

“WHY SHOULD SHE SHRINK FROM ME?”

MRS. GREVILLE sat with a look of unusual melancholy on her handsome face. It was not a habit of hers to be either very affectionate or very demonstrative, but she had learned to love Silvia; the beautiful, gentle companion had won her whole liking, and now that she lay dangerously ill, almost at the point of death, Mrs. Greville felt more sad than she had done in her whole life before.

As she sat there Lady Dynecourt was announced, and Mrs. Greville hastened to meet her.

“Is this true,” asked Lady Clotilde, “about Mrs. Rymer’s illness? I heard it last night, and I have hastened to inquire.”

“Most unfortunately, it is true. It is an illness I cannot understand. If I did not know her so well I should say that some terrible secret trouble had suddenly overtaken her. It

seems to me more mental than physical ; yet what trouble could so suddenly bring her to the verge of the grave ? ”

“ I should like to see her,” said Lady Clotilde, impulsively.

“ That is the strange part of the story,” continued Mrs. Greville. “ She sent for me this morning, and when I went she told me that she found she was going to be very ill, that she felt all the symptoms of a bad fever, and she implored me to have her sent to an infirmary.”

Lady Clotilde uttered a little cry of wonder and surprise.

“ I told her the very idea was absurd, that she was like my own sister to me, and that so far from sending her away, I should have every possible care and attention lavished upon her.”

“ What did she say then ? ” eagerly inquired Lady Clotilde.

“ She prayed me, with tears in her eyes, to consent. She said one of the maids told her she had been delirious in the night, ‘ and it would be so terrible,’ she added, ‘ if I were to be delirious here.’ ”

“ Why here more than anywhere else ? ” asked Lady Dyncourt.

“ That puzzled me,” was the reply. “ I cannot tell, only that it evidently agonized her to think of it. I told her nothing would induce me to consent. And then she prayed me, if she should be very ill, not to go near her, but leave her to strangers. I cannot help thinking that there is evidently something on her mind she fears speaking of.”

“ It certainly does seem like it,” said Lady Clotilde, musingly.

“ The strangest part is, that just as I was going out of her room, she called me back, and said to me, for the love of Heaven not to allow *you*, if she were ill and delirious, to enter the room. I told her you should not ; and that puzzles

me most, for I am certain she loves you best in all the world, after her son."

Lady Clotilde looked thoughtful.

"As you say, it is strange. I do not understand it. I came purposely to see her; but as she has urged that wish upon you, I shall not, of course, go near."

The two ladies talked for some little time longer, but Mrs. Greville was evidently depressed and sad at heart. Lady Clotilde was surprised and hurt. As she drove home again her thoughts were all with the beautiful, gentle girl she had learned to love so dearly.

"I am in her confidence," she thought. "I know the story of her life. She could say nothing, even in the madness of fever, that I should not understand. Why should she shrink from me?"

And that thought pursued her and made her wretched. There was a secret and a mystery in it, and Lady Clotilde hated both; besides, what *could* it be? Why should she shrink from her best friend?

Although her husband was at home, and visitors constantly made Dynewold House gay, Lady Clotilde could not and did not for one moment forget Silvia. She sent several times each day to inquire about her, and the answer was always the same. Mrs. Rymer was exceedingly ill. Lord Dynecourt had dismissed the matter in very few words. On the day of his return home, when he met his wife at dinner, he said, indifferently:

"So your friend is ill, Clotilde."

He looked up in astonishment when Lady Dynecourt told him where she had been found.

"Fainted in the boudoir, did she? Why, I was in the drawing-room myself, talking to a gentleman on business, and I never heard a sound"

"It could not have been at the same time, then. I was quite alarmed," said Lady Clotilde. "Besides, I am so sorry and so disappointed that you did not see her."

"Is she so very beautiful, then?" asked Lord Dynecourt.

"I have never seen another face quite like hers," she replied. "It is not only beautiful, but so sweet, so loving, so gentle, with a veil of something like sadness over it. Oh, Basil, you would admire her."

"Well, I must live in hopes of seeing her some day," said Lord Dynecourt, with a smile. "I am amused at your enthusiasm, Clotilde."

And with those few careless words he had dismissed the matter from his mind. If any one had told him that the gentle lady whom his wife had loved was the Silvia he had wooed, won, and deserted, he would not have believed it.

The great disappointment of Lord Dynecourt's married life was that he had no heir. He bore the deepest hatred against his next of kin.

"If I had but one son," he was always saying; "one son to succeed me, to carry on my name, to continue my race, I should be happy. I shall hardly rest in my grave, knowing that the man I detest is in my place."

He said but little of his disappointment, but it was none the less hard to bear. No one who looked at the handsome face would have thought a canker-worm preyed at the man's heart; no one could have imagined that, by night and by day, one ungratified longing preyed upon him, robbing life of its pleasures and tranquillity. He was not a religious man—not even a moral man—but he did ask himself at times if this denial of the only boon there was left on earth for him to desire was a punishment of his sin. He did ask himself if it would

not have been better, despite Lady Clotilde's wealth and her high connections, if he had been content with Silvia and Silvia's beautiful boy.

Ah, for such a son to succeed him—for such a boy to take his name and his honors! He had thought but little of the child. It had seemed to him rather a trouble than otherwise, only that Silvia's passionate worship amused him; but of late, since the desire of a son and heir had been paramount with him, he had begun to think more of little Cyril. He had begun to wonder if he were living or dead—what his mother had been able to do for him. Some faint shadow of parental affection awoke in his heart. Would he have believed it if he had been told that the little child whom his wife loved, and for whom he had been asked to use all his influence, was his own forsaken son?

Lord Dynecourt was not altogether a happy man; he had every luxury and magnificence this world can give; he was rich, powerful, eagerly courted; fair faces smiled on him, bright eyes brightened for him, but he was not happy. There was a vague, restless discontent always hanging over him; there were times when Silvia's loving face rose before him, and he hated himself.

"One thing is quite certain," he said to himself, "the vices of youth do not make pleasant companions for middle age."

He had loved her better than he thought; it had seemed to him so easy to woo her, to win her, and to leave her. Hundreds of men did the same thing, and suffered nothing. Either his heart was not quite hard enough, or he had learned to care for her more deeply and truly than he had imagined himself to have done.

Since the day he wrote that cold, heartless letter, he had

heard nothing of her. His lawyers had not succeeded in tracing her. She had completely ignored all the wishes he had expressed ; she had never applied for one shilling of the money set aside for her, which had now accumulated into a goodly sum. Perhaps, had he known where she was, what she was doing, how she fared, he would have been less haunted by her ; it was the very mystery surrounding her that kept her alive in his thoughts.

Many laugh at what is commonly called magnetism ; but there are depths in philosophy unknown to us. Why, when some one we love, or have loved, is near, and we do not know it, do our thoughts run so continually upon them ? Afterward we learn that they have been near, and wonder at it. So the thought of Silvia was constantly with Lord Dyncourt.

“I cannot imagine,” he said one day to himself, “why my thoughts are always going back to that time. I did not know that it was in my nature to be so constant.”

“Clotilde,” he said to his wife, “what has become of your beautiful *protégée* ? You promised me a rare beauty, and now I hear nothing of her. What is the reason ?”

“She still continues very ill,” said Lady Clotilde ; “she has had a terrible fever. However, I hope she may soon be sufficiently recovered to see me.”

“I like Mrs. Greville,” continued Lord Dyncourt ; “she is one of the few women who are really amusing. When you go to see your *protégée*, I will go with you to pay my court to the fair young widow.”

And his wife smiled, all unconscious of what that visit was to bring forth.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

“ I MUST SPARE HER, AT ANY SACRIFICE ! ”

WORDS would but weakly describe the horror that overtook the unhappy Silvia. Waking from that long sleep was more bitter than death ; the sudden rush of thought, the whirl of emotion, the shock, the fear, the surprise, were all too much for her. That she should find him again, and find him thus ! That the man she knew now to be her own husband, was also known as the husband of the woman she revered and honored more than all the world beside.

She could not recover from the shock ; it was too terrible for her. She raised her eyes as one bewildered, from earth to Heaven. What was she to do now ? Of all the unlooked-for, unexpected complications fate could have arranged for her, this was surely the last she had expected, the last thing she had looked for. She had resolved, for her boy's sake, to claim justice at his hands. How could she do that now—when justice to herself would mean sorrow, humiliation, and disgrace unutterable for the lady she loved and revered ? She knew how Lady Clotilde loved him, unworthy as he might be of such love. Was she to claim him, and break the heart that had never beaten with anything but the kindest affection for her ? Was she to take the husband of Lady Clotilde away from her ?

“ I can never do it,” she cried, wringing her hands in the greatest distress. “ I can never do it.”

Then again, word by word, all that Lady Clotilde had ever said on the subject rose before her ; she remembered it so vividly—her indignant denunciation of the wrong done,

her lofty principle, her clearly-defined, clearly-expressed ideas ; and Silvia knew, as she thought it over, that if Lady Clotilde had even the faintest gleam of suspicion, she would lay down name, position, love—nay, even life itself, should it be needful—but she would have right done.

“How can I—how can I?” she cried, wringing her hands. “It is not long since she told me how dearly she loved him. It would be easier to plunge a dagger into her heart. The punishment of his sin and my folly would all fall upon her, and she is purity itself.”

The bare thought of bringing even the shadow of pain to that gentle heart was more than she could bear. She, who knew Lady Clotilde so well, could picture to herself the depths of her anguish, the long, dreary, hopeless future, deprived of all she held most dear, and Silvia’s generous heart recoiled with horror from the thought of such suffering.

“I must spare her, I must shield her,” she cried, “at any sacrifice!”

Yet against that she had two motives. Lady Clotilde, if she knew the truth, would not thank her for so sparing her. She would prefer, as she had often told her, knowing the truth to being deceived. There was yet another reason. For herself she might be generous and self-sacrificing as she would, but there was Cyril—Cyril, no longer a nameless child, but heir to all the glory of the Dynecourts. To forego justice for herself would also be to forego justice for him ; to deprive herself of what was so justly her due, would also be to deprive him of his birthright.

“I cannot do that,” she said to herself—“I *must* not do it ; for Cyril’s sake I must claim Cyril’s own, cost what it may.”

So, a hundred times each hour, she argued to herself ; one reason overstepping another, one argument seeming to her

stronger than another, until the tired brain grew weary, and the aching heart ready to break.

What *was* she to do? She appealed from earth to Heaven; she raised her weeping eyes to the clear, blue skies; she tried to quiet the whirl of her thoughts, and find out what her duty was. She tried to find the highest and the noblest, but the storm of emotion was too great for her—thoughts, feelings, inclination, duty, all warred together; the overtaxed brain gave way, and a violent fever was the result. She was not the first whom duty, inclination, principle, and pity, all warring together, had brought to the very verge of the grave. When she discovered what was the matter with herself, and tried in vain to arrange her wandering thoughts, she grew still more frightened. What would happen if delirium should seize her, and she should talk of those things that she would so fain have kept secret? She knew Lady Clotilde's kindly feelings for her. What if she should come to visit her, and hear only one word of this terrible secret?

Silvia trembled; and in her nervous fear she did exactly what she should have avoided—asked Mrs. Greville not to let Lady Dynecourt see her, so betraying to both a hidden, secret fear they could not understand.

She was some time in recovering; but Mrs. Greville kept faith most honorably with her. She allowed no visitors, however friendly, to enter the room; she engaged a strange nurse, accustomed to delirious patients, who paid no more heed to her raving than if it had been so much Greek; and then, when slowly, but surely, Silvia recovered, she forebore asking her any questions, or teasing her by any remarks, which was, perhaps, the greatest kindness of all.

Days passed by, and Silvia, looking like the shadow of her former self, began to resume her duties and take up the bur-

den of life. She had come to no decision as to what she should do; she was no nearer any definite resolution than she had ever been; it was all chaos to her. She could see no gleam of light in the darkness; no sunshine, no break in the thick cloud. Turn which way she would all was misery, confusion, unhappiness, and despair.

“If I could but find some stronger, clearer mind than my own to lean upon,” she said to herself; “if I could but take my trouble to some wise, learned, good man, who could tell me in Heaven’s name, and for Heaven’s sake, what was best, how thankful I should be. I must wait—I must do nothing hurriedly.”

But the sound of the name Dynecourt had grown almost terrible to her—it was full of torture. One hour she said to herself that she must take patience—she must wait—do nothing on her own responsibility; the next such patience, such waiting, seemed to her little less than deadly sin. There was a duty to be done, and she must do it; there was justice to be claimed, she must claim it.

No wonder that the sweet face grew thinner and whiter every day. Mrs. Greville became alarmed at last.

“Silvia,” she said, one day, “I must speak plainly to you. Do you not know that unless you change, and that quickly, you must die?”

Silvia raised her beautiful, startled eyes to the handsome face.

“I do not know anything of the kind,” she said, gravely.

“Then it is high time that you should be told that you are just recovering from a dangerous illness. You neither eat nor sleep, smile or rest. How do you expect to get strong?”

“I had no thought about it,” said Silvia.

“No; that is very evident. Do you want to leave your boy quite alone in the world?”

The lovely, gentle face grew white and wistful.

"My boy! Oh, no—a thousand times no! What could he do without me?"

"Then change your ways, my dear," said Mrs. Greville, brusquely. "I cannot help seeing that some terrible sorrow is preying upon you and eating your very life away. I do not ask what it is; I do not seek your confidence; but I advise you, if, for your son's sake, you would wish to live, do something—anything rather than what you are doing now."

Very plain words, but Mrs. Greville was accustomed to very plain speaking, and in this case it was most beneficial.

"For my boy's sake I must live," thought Silvia; "yet for me life can never be anything but a burden."

The day following, as she sat in the library, writing some letters for Mrs. Greville, that frank, imperious lady entered.

"Now, Silvia, you remember that little lecture I gave you yesterday; show that you have profited by it. Lady Clotilde is here, and wishes you to go out for a drive with her?"

The girl shrank, white and shuddering, faint with dread, even at the sound of the very name.

"I—I cannot go," she cried faintly.

"Nonsense," was the calm reply. "You must—it will do you good. Surely you cannot refuse Lady Clotilde any favor she asks from you?"

Silvia trembled violently.

"Whatever it is that is wrong," said Mrs. Greville to herself, "it concerns Lady Clotilde, although she may not know it."

How the argument would have ended is quite uncertain,

but that Lady Dynecourt appeared that moment on the scene.

"Silvia," she cried, "how glad I am to see you! I had not patience to wait for your answer, so I followed Mrs. Greville. Do you know that it is three weeks since I saw you."

And Lady Clotilde, bending down, kissed the white face, while a low moan came from Silvia's lips.

"If I could but die!" she murmured to herself. "How *am* I to bear it?"

How was she to stab that loving heart, to blight that life, to bow that graceful head with such deep, unmerited shame?

"I will not hear one word of excuse," said Lady Clotilde. "The morning is fine, the air fresh. Come, Silvia, you cannot say nay to me."

CHAPTER LXIX.

FACE TO FACE AT LAST.

"SILVIA," said Lady Dynecourt, when they were out of sight, "I cannot understand you; you make me very unhappy. Have I done anything that has displeased you?"

The white, silent face was raised for one half-minute, and then turned silently away.

"How could you displease me, Lady Clotilde? You have always been kindness itself to me."

"Then tell me frankly, why have you changed so utterly to me? You do not know all you were to me, Silvia; you were sweet and refreshing as a wild woodland flower among warm exotics. I used to enjoy your society as I did the fresh breeze blowing over the heather, and now you shun me, you

avoid me, you even turn your face from me lest I should see it! Why is it, Silvia? What have I done?"

The pale lips quivered, the lines of anguish round them deepened.

"You have done nothing, Lady Clotilde," repeated the faint voice. "What *could* you do?"

"There is no effect without a cause," said Lady Dynecourt; "if I have done nothing, why have you changed so completely to me?"

"I am very unhappy," said Silvia, making a great effort to control herself, and speak calmly. "I am the most unhappy creature, I believe, living at this moment in the world; and my unhappiness has changed me, Lady Clotilde. I am changed toward my own self. Pray, pray forgive me if I have seemed changed to you; I have not meant it. I owe you nothing but affection and reverence—nothing can change that."

"But, Silvia, unhappiness need not make you shun *me*. I know all your story; you have no secrets from me. Why not trust me, and if anything has happened, tell me?"

She did not understand the almost convulsive shudder that made the delicate figure at her side tremble.

"I am hurt, Silvia," she continued, after a time. "It is so seldom that I love any one as I love you. I am cruelly disappointed."

And the kind face grew sad, the kind eyes filled with tears. It was hard to bear. Yet, if she suffered now, what would her suffering be should she obtain one glimpse of the truth? Better by far that Lady Clotilde should think her cold, capricious, mean, changeable, unkind—anything rather than that she should know the truth; for Silvia was still undecided as to what course it would be right for her to adopt.

"I have promised you," continued Lady Dynecourt, "my friendship while I live ; I have given that to few. I promised you that my husband's interest should be used for your son to advance his career."

She paused abruptly, for Silvia had laid her hand on her arm.

"For Heaven's sake, hush !" she said, in a low voice, so full of anguished entreaty that Lady Clotilde was startled. "Hush !" she repeated ; "I cannot endure another word."

"There is nothing wrong over Cyril, is there?" asked Lady Clotilde, quickly.

"No ; but I cannot bear another word. I am very unhappy, Lady Dynecourt ; be kind to me, and take me home."

One look at the white face, with its expression of deep anguish, influenced Lady Clotilde to promptly grant Silvia's earnest prayer.

"Back to Mrs. Greville's," she said, briefly, to the coachman, more hurt, more puzzled, than she had ever been.

Lady Dynecourt said no more, and they drove home in silence. She had intended to tell Silvia that Lord Dynecourt would be at Mrs. Greville's, but she was too unhappy even to remember that. Only, as they drew near the house, she took Silvia's cold hand for one minute in hers.

"Silvia," she said, gently, "if ever the time comes when you repent having thrown away and wounded a good friend, you will only have to seek me. I promise you that you shall find me again, and all this shall be forgotten."

Tears rained down Silvia's white face, but she made no reply. What could she say? What pretext had she to offer? She must either tell the whole truth, or let Lady Clotilde think of her as she would.

They re-entered the house in total silence, Lady Dynecourt more hurt than she cared to acknowledge even to herself. She went to the drawing-room, expecting to find Mrs. Greville and Lord Dynecourt. Silvia went up stairs, where, throwing off her bonnet and shawl, she wept for some minutes with a violence of emotion that frightened even herself. Nothing had ever been so hard for her as this trying to harden her heart against the gentle, kindly lady, who had never done anything but lavish benefits upon her.

"It was hard," she said to herself, "bitterly hard. Oh! if she knew the truth!"

She waited some moments in her own room, then, thinking the visitors would be gone, she went down stairs to finish Mrs. Greville's letters.

As she went down the grand staircase, she said to herself:

"I must go away from here until I know what it is best for me to do. I could not bear another scene like this morning's."

She paused one half-minute at the drawing-room door. She heard several voices talking and laughing, and so concluded Mrs. Greville was still engaged.

"I will finish the letters first," she thought. "I can speak to her afterward."

It so happened that while Lord Dynecourt was what he called "paying his court" to the brilliant widow, he had suddenly remembered an important letter that he had promised to send, and had completely forgotten. It had reference to a speech that was to be made that evening in the House of Lords, and was of the highest importance. The sudden change in his face and voice told Mrs. Greville that he was not quite at ease. He explained to her what it was.

“Go to the library,” she said ; “you will find all you require there.”

He bade her adieu, knowing that he should not have time to return to the drawing-room again.

“How long shall you be writing that letter, Basil ? ” asked Lady Clotilde.

“No more than ten minutes,” he replied.

“Then I will come to the library to you,” said Lady Dyncourt, “and we will drive home together.”

“That will suit my arrangements exactly,” he replied ; and, all unconscious of the web closing around him, he left the drawing-room with a smile on his face and gay, complimentary words on his lips.

He sat down to the library table, and was soon busily engaged with his letter.

He did not hear the light footsteps that descended the stairs, or the gentle touch at the handle of the door ; no shadow fell between him and the sunshine.

He heard and saw nothing, until a low gasping sound, that was neither sigh nor moan, yet was like both, startled him, and he looked up.

Looked up to see standing there, with a white face and eyes full of unutterable anguish, with quivering lips and clasped, rigid hands—the girl he had left long years ago ; the girl whose beautiful face he had kissed, with falsehood in his heart, and falsehood on his lips ; the girl he had wooed, won, and deserted !

He had seen her last in that pretty cottage home, and had left her, knowing that he was about to break her heart ! and—once more the betrayer and the betrayed, the victim and the victimizer met again !

CHAPTER LXX.

AN UNEXPECTED WITNESS.

NOT one word did Lord Dynecourt utter as his astonished gaze lingered on the beautiful, shrinking, sorrowful figure. It seemed to him that his senses were playing him false. His thoughts had been so entirely occupied with his letter that it seemed to him like an apparition; so for some minutes they remained in perfect silence, spell-bound, as it were, the silence between them growing every minute more terrible. Then Lord Dynecourt rose slowly from his seat.

"Silvia," he said, in a low, frightened tone, "is that you? Speak to me, for Heaven's sake!"

But he might just as well have told the tide to flow when it should ebb. All power of speech was gone from her. She leaned against the wall like one whose strength was spent.

"Silvia," he repeated, gently, going up to her and holding out his hand, "if you could only tell how relieved I am to see you again."

She had gone through this meeting in fancy a thousand times. She had pictured herself speaking to him with all the dignity of outraged virtue, with all the severity of wounded love; but now that the moment had come, woman like, she forgot everything save that she had loved him. She saw his eyes bent upon her with the old, familiar, loving glance, and she clasped her hands, crying:

"Oh, Ulric! Ulric! how could you? Do not touch me! How could you leave me so?"

The lovely face, the sad voice, with its passionate cry, the

raining tears, the simple words touched him more deeply than anything had ever done before.

“Was it such a trouble to you, Silvia, my going? In all these years have you not forgotten me?”

“Forgotten you!” she repeated, and her voice was like the sweetest, saddest music. “Forgotten you—my husband and Cyril’s father!”

For one half-minute a most uncomfortable expression came over his face. They were both too deeply engrossed to hear the rustle of Lady Clotilde’s dress; the ten minutes had expired, and she had come to seek her husband. The sound of Silvia’s voice arrested her—arrested her footsteps, stopped the beating of her heart, froze the blood in her veins, rooted her to the spot where she stood—paralyzed her with horror and amaze.

Silvia and her husband, Lord Dynecourt—Silvia, speaking to him with her voice full of anguish—speaking to him of Cyril!

Oh, Heaven! what did it mean?

Suddenly, with a sharp pain no word can describe, she remembered that once—how long was it since—he had called her Silvia, and when she half-jealously asked him the reason why, he had told her some idle story about a book that he was reading.

Silvia! Could it be that Silvia of whom he was speaking? Could it be possible? Then she stopped short and flung the thought indignantly from her. *Her* husband the man who had betrayed Silvia—her beloved Basil! Ah, no! perish the horrible notion. Yet, *what* was going on in that room? What terrible words was she listening to?

“Do you know,” Silvia was saying, “that since you deserted me—since you went away and left me—I have discovered that our marriage was legal and valid?”

He recoiled as though she had struck him a sudden blow.

"Legal and valid!" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," she cried, indignantly, "that you overreached yourself! You intended to deceive me, and you deceived yourself. You intended to cheat me; you cheated yourself and the hapless, helpless lady who bears your name!"

He drew a step nearer to her.

"Hush!" he said. "For Heaven's sake, mind what you are saying."

"I know perfectly well what I am saying, and I repeat it—*our* marriage was perfectly valid and legal! I have had the first and best opinion in England upon it. I know that any day I choose to claim your name for myself and my child, it is mine. It is your second marriage with the unhappy, noble lady who believes herself your wife that is not legal."

"I cannot believe it," he replied, in a hoarse voice.

"Nevertheless it is perfectly true. I do not ask you to take *my* word; take what advice you will. You are not the first, my lord, who, having laid a trap for his neighbor, has fallen into it himself. You thought, on that fair summer when you stopped at the old Scotch manse and went through what you believed to be the mockery of a marriage with me, that you had lured me, duped me, deceived me—that you had made me your victim. My lord, you deceived yourself; you were the victim of your own sin, and I escaped. That marriage was perfectly legal—perfectly in accordance with the Scotch law, and by it I am your lawful wife."

She spoke with such simple, queen-like dignity he was bewildered. Though the interests he had at stake were so great, he could not refrain, even then, from showing his light, frivolous nature. Her dignity, her beauty, struck him with amaze; this delicate, queen-like grace and loveliness, this

refinement of word and manner, was so different to the healthy young beauty he had married, that he could hardly believe his senses.

"Silvia," he said, suddenly, "how you have changed; how altered you are; how beautiful and graceful you have grown!"

"Are you not ashamed to speak to me in that fashion?" she cried, indignantly. "It is not of my beauty, but of my honor and fair name, my son's birthright, we are speaking."

He recoiled again.

"Your son's birthright!" he repeated, slowly, as though a new and bewildering idea were breaking upon him. "Those words have a strange sound, Silvia."

"Do you know," she continued, with increased energy—"do you know, can you estimate the ruin you have wrought around you? Do you know the fate of the noble lady you have married, if I urge my claim? Have you thought of the unmerited shame and disgrace that would fall upon her?"

"I have never thought of it," he replied, "simply because I never believed in my marriage with you."

"You dare to avow it?" she cried, her whole frame trembling with anger.

"Silvia," he said, suddenly, "is it possible that you are the beautiful *protégée* of whom Lady Clotilde has been talking to me for weeks past? Are you living with Mrs. Greville as companion?"

"Yes," she replied; "and since I have known the truth, Lady Clotilde's kindness has almost killed me."

"And can it be possible," he continued, in a tone of utter amazement, "that the boy for whom she has been asking my interest, is your son?"

"Yes," she replied; "the same child whom you left, years ago, to the mercies of a cruel world."

"Of all strange freaks that fortune ever played, this is the strangest," he said, musingly. "Why, Silvia, I have had England searched for you, I have neglected no means of finding you, and you have been near to me all the time: you have even been to my house, and—ah! why, you were taken ill there!"

"Yes; my illness was caused by my fear in recognizing you; the shock of it almost killed me."

"And you have known me since then?"

"Yes," she replied, shrinking from the love and admiration in his face.

"Yet you have not denounced me, Silvia?"

"No. By night and by day I have been trying to think what it was right for me to do, and I could not decide. Lady Clotilde is unequalled for goodness, beauty, grace, and true nobility. I love her so dearly that, if she needed it, I could lay down my life for her. How could I decide hurriedly on anything that could injure her—the truest, sweetest heart that beats? If I were alone in the world, I would have preferred death to bringing sorrow upon her. My heart has been torn between loving pity for her and anxiety for my son."

"But, Silvia, it cannot be possible that this story of yours is true?"

"It is true as that the sun shines in the bright heavens. You shall prove it for yourself."

"I am bewildered," he said. "I never thought of it. I own the truth to you, frankly, Silvia—I had no intention of marrying you. I intended to deceive you; but you were so good and so innocent, I had no other resource than this."

"I believed in it," she replied; "and for the validity of the marriage, you will find it quite sufficient."

"Verily, the vices of our youth make lashes to scourge us with!" said Lord Dynecourt to himself.

"I have spared you," continued Silvia, "for Lady Clotilde's sake. For her sake I shall pause yet."

But the words died on her lips. A hand was laid on her arm. Lady Clotilde's face, white and haggard with horror, was looking into her own.

"Will you tell me," she said, hoarsely, "what this means? Basil—Silvia—am *I* mad, or are *you*?"

And the two, who would have shielded her from the full horror of the truth, looked at each other in unutterable dismay.

"Tell me!" she repeated. "I have only half understood, and I *must* know."

Yet still they looked at each other, not knowing what to say.

CHAPTER LXXI.

"A MAN CAN HAVE BUT ONE WIFE!"

LORD DYNECOURT was the first to recover himself; Silvia shrank with horror and dismay; he went up to Lady Dynecourt.

"My dear Clotilde," he said, in a constrained, embarrassed voice, "I am very sorry that you should have overheard this discussion; I had no idea that you were near. Pray let me call the carriage for you."

But she waved him away with the gesture of a queen.

"Nay, hear me," he continued. "Perhaps to your pure

ears I should not plead a boyish imprudence; but it was nothing more—a boyish infatuation——”

“Hush!” she said, calmly. “Silvia, answer me one question—only one. Is Lord Dynecourt the man who took you to Scotland—who went through the ceremony of marriage with you—whom you believed to be your husband?”

Her lips quivered as she uttered the word. She looked earnestly at Silvia, but she made no reply; she could not utter the syllable that was to bring such utter ruin on the head of the noble and gentle lady who, like herself, had been so cruelly deceived.

Lady Clotilde went up to the shrinking figure; she laid her hand again on Silvia’s arm.

“I understand your generous silence,” she said. “You would fain spare me if you could. Silvia, remember all I said to you when we talked over your story; I repeat it now. Better any torture than the anguish of being deceived. Answer me truly—Is Lord Dynecourt the man?”

It was a scene never to be forgotten. Lord Dynecourt, who had by his sin brought this terrible trouble on two innocent women, stood with a flush of guilt on his handsome face, his eyes bent on the ground, the picture of guilty confusion, of shame, of embarrassment. He would have given the whole world to have ended an interview so terrible in itself, but could not.

Lady Clotilde—perhaps the most deeply injured and most deeply wronged—stood calm, proud, and dignified; all the self-control that comes from high-breeding, from perfect training, was hers. She concealed the anguish that tortured her; she stood with calm, proud eyes, her face white to the very lips, waiting the answer that did not come.

"Silvia," she said, gently, "do you not understand that your silence, which means your pity, is more insulting, more degrading to me than any acknowledgment of the truth could possibly be? Answer my question—*Is* Lord Dynecourt the man?"

Then Silvia, weeping, fell on her knees and clasped Lady Clotilde's dress.

"Spare me!" she sobbed. "It would be easier far for me to die than to hurt you."

"Then I am quite answered, Silvia," said Lady Clotilde, with a quiet kind of despair that still left her dignity untouched. "I had some faint hope that my senses had deceived me, that my ears had played me false; that hope is over. Your silence tells me even more than your words could have done."

Silvia looked up into the beautiful, mournful face. Ah! indeed it would have been easier, twenty times, to have branded the white brow with a scorching iron, to have plunged a keen dagger into the gentle breast, than to have told her how false, how untrue, how utterly dishonorable the man she loved was.

Perhaps Silvia's silence shamed him, for Lord Dynecourt moved uneasily, and then, drawing nearer, said:

"Clotilde, it will save both time and trouble if I avow to you frankly that I *am* the man. It was a boyish indiscretion—nothing more, upon my honor."

"Your honor!" she repeated, calmly; "the honor of a man who has twice perjured himself. Leave that word out of the discussion, my lord."

"Do not be *too* severe, Clotilde. I know how uncompromising and stern is the virtue of a virtuous woman; but remember, the greatest sinner may ask for mercy."

Her face softened at the words, but grew cold and grave as he continued :

“ I repeat, it was but a boyish indiscretion. You must not judge me too hardly.”

Her clear, proud eyes met his without shrinking.

“ You met this girl when she was beautiful, young, and innocent ? ” she said. “ Answer me——”

“ I did,” he replied.

“ You loved her ; you won her love ; you won her whole heart ; and, seeing that she was good as she was beautiful, you asked her to be *your wife* ? Answer me ! ” she repeated, for his face flushed and his head drooped.

“ I did,” he murmured.

“ She consented, believing in you as she believes in Heaven ; she went away with you—leaving mother, home, and friends—sure that she was safe with you as with an angel ? ”

“ It was so,” said Lord Dynecourt.

“ You took her to Scotland ; married her ; gave her every reason to believe that she was your lawful wife—until you tired of her ? ”

He bowed his head. Words failed him this time.

Then Lady Clotilde raised her hand solemnly.

“ And I say to you, Basil Dynecourt, that she *is* your wife, your legal, lawful wife, before man and God. *I* am the one who has been deceived. When she, little knowing who I was, first told me her story, I assured her then that she was married. I have never changed my opinion. Your lawful wife stands there, my lord. I have only been your dupe.”

He drew nearer to her, but she shrank from him.

“ No,” she said ; “ all is over between us, Basil Dynecourt. I take no woman’s place save my own.”

“ Clotilde ! Have you no love left for me ? ” he cried.

"No, my lord, none. My love was slain when my respect and esteem died."

"Then never was man so cruelly punished," he cried, with quivering lips.

"There never was a man so deserving of punishment," she replied. "Do not be afraid, Lord Dynecourt; we will keep up appearances. You are thinking what the world will say; it shall say nothing; it shall know nothing—not yet, at least. I will return to Dynewold House with you, and from there we will go together to my mother, Lady Voyse, who will make all needful preparations for receiving me."

"Clotilde, you cannot be so unjust as to condemn me unheard—without hearing one word; hear my defense. Hear, at least, the opinion of my lawyers and counsel."

"There is no need," she replied. "I know the laws of God; that is sufficient for me. I do not heed the laws of man."

"But you are unjust to me," he cried; "you are cruel to me. You take her word against mine. Is that fair?"

"I have done nothing of the kind," she replied, calmly. "I have judged and condemned you out of your own lips, and from her words. You made her your wife, as she thought and believed, as was really the case, years ago. You shall abide by that action now."

Then she turned to the weeping girl who clung to her. She tried to raise her, to still the passionate weeping, to check the bitter tears.

"Silvia," she said, gently, "you are my sister in misfortune; there is no need for you to weep so bitterly. *You* have not wronged me; you merit nothing from me but my blessings and prayers. You are to be pitied just as much as I am myself. You are Lord Dynecourt's lawful wife, and your little son his lawful heir."

A spasm of pain passed over her face at the words, but she controlled herself quickly.

"You must always remember," she continued, laying her hand on the bowed head, "that there is not in my whole heart and soul one unkind thought of you. You will bear the name I have borne; you will take my place; but, with all, you will take my affection and esteem."

Nothing could still that terrible weeping. Silvia had no words. Lord Dynecourt's face had grown pale as death.

"For Heaven's sake, Clotilde," he cried, pleadingly, "do not talk in that strain, unless you want to kill me."

But she turned her calm, proud face to him.

"My lord," she said, "will *you* remember that except so far as keeping up appearances goes, we are strangers."

Then Silvia clasped those cold hands and covered them with passionate tears and kisses.

"Lady Clotilde," she said, "let *me* go away; let me go and hide myself from the whole world; I cannot bear that you should suffer for my folly. I am nobody—obscure, unknown. I have no proud, loving parents; I have no position; the world is nothing to me. You are one of its queens. Stay in the place you fill so well. Oh, if I were but dead! If I had but died a thousand times over before bringing this sorrow upon you!"

Lady Clotilde looked down on the weeping, agitated girl.

"Silvia, all such pleading to me is utterly vain. *You know my* sentiments; nothing can alter them. A man can have but one wife; *you* are Lord Dynecourt's."

What other words she intended were never uttered. A servant announced the carriage. Silvia turned aside her flushed face, lest the trace of tears should be seen. Lady

Clotilde, calm with the proud calm of despair, merely said :

“I will write to you when I have decided what course to adopt. In the mean time remain quietly here.”

CHAPTER LXXII.

“SHE IS THE MOTHER OF YOUR CHILD.”

THAT drive through the crowded streets, thronged by bright, busy, happy, active faces, was like the phantasm of a dream to Lady Clotilde and the silent, unhappy man at her side. Houses, trees, the smiling heavens, the shining sun, the whispering wind, all confused her. It was a hideous nightmare, from which she was never more to awaken.

It was more like a dream than a reality; not even to herself had she realized quite all that had happened. A dull horror seemed to pervade her. She tried to say to herself that the man by her side was not her husband—that her marriage, whatever it might be in the eyes of man, was, before Heaven, a mockery and a cheat—that neither birth, connections, high rank, nor anything else, had been powerful enough to save her from the most cruel fate that could befall a woman.

He spoke to her once, and once only; but something in her face frightened him.

“Clotilde,” he cried, “I wish that I were dead!”

The sad, stern eyes, raised for one half-moment to his, said “life held agony far more terrible than death.” Then Dynewold House was reached, and the carriage stopped. She waved from her, with an air of superb indifference, the outstretched hand that would have aided her, and entered the house alone. It was rather a relief than otherwise to the earl

to be a few minutes alone. He did not blame himself—he did not feel sorry that his own sin and folly had brought him to that pass; he merely cursed his fate in no very measured terms.

“Was there ever a man in such a fix?” he thought; “was there ever such a fate? Was there ever such a mischance known as the meeting of these two women? To think that, though the world is so large—that they two, above all others, should meet—should know and like each other! It is enough to make any man wish that there were no women; nothing but sorrow comes of knowing them.”

He trembled as he followed her into the house. It was one thing to betray, to work the ruin of a poor, unknown country girl—it was quite another to have made a terrible mistake, and to let the consequences of it fall upon a highborn lady, whose cause the world would be sure to espouse with open arms.

“The worst of it is,” he said to himself, “that Clotilde has such a sentimental, high-flown, what she calls religious way of looking at things, that if she really gets this fixed in her mind, nothing will prevent her making a grand exposure, and I shall be the laughing-stock of all London; there could not be a more ridiculous situation for any man.”

“My lady wishes to see you in the library, my lord; she is waiting there,” said a servant, who had noted with surprise the changed face of his mistress.

“And if there is nothing wrong there,” added John to himself, “I will never pretend to understand domestic affairs again.”

When Lord Dyncourt entered the library with a shrinking heart, Lady Clotilde stood at the window. He was almost startled by the awful change in her face as she turned to him.

It was blanched with pain, drawn with anguish; deep line

showed where no lines had appeared before ; the eyes had in them a shadow that was never to be removed.

He went up to her impulsively. He had loved Silvia with a love that was born entirely of her beauty, her tenderness, her impassioned devotion and affection for himself ; he loved Lady Clotilde in a less degree, but it was with a love born of respect and esteem for her virtues—of admiration for her high and noble qualities ; and it was mixed with a certain kind of fear and awe of her opinion.

He forgot this awe when he saw her blanched face ; he held out his arms to her, only remembering that she was his wife—the woman who bore his name.

“Clotilde !” he cried ; but she shrank as though he had stabbed her.

“You forget,” she said ; “we are strangers.”

“Do not say such things, Clotilde. You must not run off with this most foolish notion ; you must listen to reason. You cannot in justice condemn me unheard.”

“It is because I love justice that I condemn you,” she replied.

“I have avowed to you frankly my indiscretion—it was hardly a crime. Silvia was very lovely, and I was very young.”

“Hush !” she said. “Can you not imagine what it costs me to hear such words ? Spare me all further pain.”

“But you *must* listen ; how else am I to make you understand ? How many hundreds, I may say thousands, of young men besides myself have done the same thing ? and afterward, when they reform and marry, their wives would not dream of resenting what happened before marriage.”

“Do not tell me of other women,” she said ; “I have no desire to know. My own conscience tells me enough. I

shall listen to its dictates. All false reasoning, all sophistry, all weak excuses, fall into insignificance before eternal truth. You married Silvia, and Silvia alone is your wife."

"I can only think by your persisting in this that you have never loved me, Clotilde."

"You know that is false. I have loved you very dearly with all my heart, and in all my life I have known no other love."

"Then why be so cruel?"

"Justice is not cruelty; right is not cruelty. The consequences of sin must fall somewhere; if they fall on me, I will bear them. Say what you will, Basil, but never say again that I have not loved you. If I had not loved you, why should my heart be broken now?"

"Is your heart broken, Clotilde?"

"Yes, surely as my lips are speaking. The life of my body may linger on as long as Heaven shall please, but the life of my heart is ended forever."

"If you would but listen to me—if you could but forgive me—if you would but believe in the depths of my sorrow! Oh, Clotilde, we might begin life over again and be so happy!"

She sighed deeply.

"You do not understand," she said. "I despair of making you understand. Can you not perceive; do you not see how impossible it is for us *ever* to be happy again? Listen to me, Basil. I have never sought to intrude what you call my religious ideas upon you—never; perhaps you may not understand how deeply they are engraven on my very soul. Basil, I could not do what I thought would offend God; I could not if all the happiness in the world were offered to me as the price of my sin."

"You need not," he replied, earnestly.

"Again, you do not understand me. I tell you—and nothing can alter my belief—I tell you that, before Heaven, Silvia is your wife. You married her, and, for any intention you might have of deceiving her, she was quite innocent. She has the first and most valid claim upon you. She is the mother of your child; and no prayer that you can pray, no pleading that you can plead, no arguments, *nothing* can move me. To remain here as your wife, knowing that I am not, and never have been your wife, would be to offend Heaven, to sin horribly—and *I shall not do it!*"

Looking at her, with her pale, noble face bright with the light that shone on the brows of the martyrs of old, Lord Dynecourt felt himself more small, more mean, more insignificant than he had ever done before.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

A LAWYER'S OPINION.

LORD DYNECOURT knew at once that if Lady Clotilde entrenched herself behind such arguments as those, her resolution was unalterable; and now that for the first time the fear of losing her really took possession of him, he felt all that the loss must entail.

"I see it is useless for me to plead," he said. "Clotilde, do me one grace—let me send for the lawyer, who knows all my affairs, who knew of this unfortunate escapade, who undertook to settle it for me, and we will abide by what he says."

He felt sure that in Mr. Tresham he should find a friend; that Mr. Tresham would laugh all Lady Clotilde's sentiment and religion to scorn; that his matter-of-fact, dry, legal way

of looking at the business would insensibly influence her, that his worldly knowledge would impress her ; but Lord Dynecourt was mistaken.

“ I see no use in your sending for Mr. Tresham,” she said, wearily ; “ *his* ideas of right and wrong will not change *mine*. Still, if it be your wish, I accede to it. You will, I am sure, excuse me until he comes.”

And without another word she quitted the room, leaving him more miserable than he had ever thought it possible for a peer of the realm, possessed of almost unlimited wealth, to be.

He had thought to move her by prayers and supplications ; he had pictured to himself a scene where he should be kneeling at her feet, weeping, perhaps, if he found it needful to go to such lengths ; then a reconciliation ; Silvia amply provided for ; the boy, perhaps, adopted ; and everything most satisfactory and pleasant. Of course he should have to be very contrite and attentive for some long time afterward. Then all would be well, and he should be well out of a terrible position.

But this dream was not to be realized. Lady Clotilde had taken a higher view of the whole matter than he had expected. She had chosen to make a religious question of it, and, if it came to that, Lord Dynecourt knew so very little of religion that he said to himself, with a shrug of the shoulders, “ it was quite impossible to tell how he did stand.”

He sent at once to Mr. Tresham, and that gentleman, full of amaze at the imperious summons, hastened to obey. He found Lord Dynecourt in a state of great agitation and excitement, walking with rapid footsteps up and down the library.

“ Tresham,” cried Lord Dynecourt, “ I am in one of the most terrible positions that ever yet fell to the lot of any man.”

The lawyer, who knew that, as far as money was concerned, his client was one of the most prosperous of human beings, looked up in amaze.

"What is the matter, my lord?" he asked, quickly.

"That is just what I want you to hear," he replied; "but stay; I promised my lady not to utter one word except in her presence. I must call her. I dare not do otherwise."

"Why—what is the matter?" repeated Mr. Tresham.

"Oh! that horrible Scotch affair has all come to light, and my lady has taken very high grounds over it; in fact, *I* cannot bring her to reason, and *you* must."

Mr. Tresham looked at his hat in alarm.

"I would really so much rather *not* interfere," he said. "I can do no good; it is quite out of my province. *You ought* to manage it, my lord. No one else *can* interfere."

And the lawyer looked so genuinely frightened that Lord Dynecourt, despite the gravity of his position, could not refrain from smiling. All thoughts of smiles died away when the door opened and Lady Clotilde entered. Mr. Tresham looked almost frightened at her white face.

"What has she suffered," he thought, "to change her so?"

There was nothing tragical in her look or manner; but her deep anguish, her unutterable woe, seemed to clothe her as with a garment. She went up to Mr. Tresham, and it seemed to him years had passed over her head since he had seen her last.

"Lord Dynecourt has sent for you," she began, slowly, "wishing you to give your advice honestly and truly. Before you do so, let me warn you that this is a question not merely concerning property, worldly interests, or anything of that kind, but nearly touching the salvation of immortal souls;

think of that before you give your opinion. Now, my lord, tell your story."

It was with a strange, nervous hesitation that the unhappy nobleman told the story. Lady Clotilde listened calmly; the lawyer's face grew darker and graver as he heard.

"Give the details of that marriage as they were given to me," said Lady Clotilde.

Not without much agitation, hesitation, and embarrassment did he comply. Mr. Tresham's face grew still graver.

"And this was in the presence of witnesses who are living now?" he asked.

"Yes, they are living, I suppose," was the reply.

"But, my lord, you did not give us these details when you mentioned the affair to us," said Mr. Tresham.

"I did not think of them," he replied, trying to assume an indifference he was far from feeling.

"They materially change the aspect of the business, though. They make it, in fact, a very awkward one, and I should prefer declining altogether to give any opinion."

"But you cannot decline," said Lady Clotilde. "You are Lord Dynecourt's legal adviser, and bound as such to give him your honest, unbiassed opinion."

"Do not be afraid to speak, Tresham," said his lordship, who pitied the embarrassment of his man of business. "Indeed, there is little need for speaking; if you had anything cheerful to say to me, you would have said it before now."

Mr. Tresham's only reply was a kind of groan.

"It is a most unfortunate business altogether, my lord; but I am indeed afraid that, if it came to a trial, the decision would be in favor of your first marriage."

“That is your opinion as a lawyer,” said Lady Clotilde ; “now tell me what you think as a man of honor.”

“My lady, permit me to decline answering you. Long years of faithful service have endeared the name of Dynecourt to me ; I must decline to sit in judgment on one who has long been to me a generous employer.”

“You simply give your legal opinion, then, when you say the first marriage would hold good in law ?”

He bowed assent. Then Lady Clotilde turned to Lord Dynecourt.

“You will find,” she said, “that all legal opinion in England will agree. This gentleman, bound to you by every tie of gratitude and interest, is obliged to take part against you. There is nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable. I say before Mr. Tresham, the first witness before whom I have spoken, that I acknowledge *my* marriage to be null and void.”

The lawyer rose in deepest distress.

“My lady,” he cried, “pray reconsider your words!—pray think of the consequences ! Surely some arrangement can be made that will satisfy you and make matters pleasant. You *cannot* think of leaving Lord Dynecourt. Think of the commotion, the excitement, the wonder of the world, the ruin, the desolation, the sorrow that you bring down upon his head and upon your own ! Think of the misery into which you plunge your family and friends ! It must not be thought of, my lady, not for one moment, believe me.”

The noble, earnest face was turned for one half-minute to him.

“There is but one consideration that will be of any weight with me, Mr. Tresham—that will not be of this world, but the next. I shall try to do what is right before God—the rest may go.”

"But, Lady Dynecourt," he began.

"Nay," she said, interrupting him, "that is not my name."

He sat down again, with a gesture of resignation and despair. The light deepened in her eyes as she continued :

"This is a worldly age, Mr. Tresham—an age when everything most sound is held of little account—an age, above all, when the sanctity of the marriage tie is held as naught—when men openly set at defiance the Divine command of marriage ! I, for one, enter my protest against such a state of things. I will make no compromise, no arrangement ; I will do simply what is right ; should it blight my life, break my heart, estrange me from all I love most dearly, still I will do what is right, and nothing else."

Her voice grew firmer as she proceeded.

"I married an angel," thought Lord Dynecourt, "not a mere mortal woman ; and between men and angels there cannot be much in common."

While Mr. Tresham, hardy old lawyer as he was, wiped the tears from his eyes.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

"HOW WILL IT END?"

I HAVE thought over the arrangements that seem best to me," said Lady Clotilde ; "it is quite useless to think that we can keep it from the world—the world *must* know. If only one person learns a lesson, if only one man learns to be less selfish, and one young girl to be more prudent, I shall not have suffered in vain. It is too late now to-day to take any steps at all ; to-morrow, Lord Dynecourt, I shall ask you

to escort me to my mother's house. There we say farewell forever in this world ; there your lawyer can meet mine, and you can make any arrangement you wish over property. I am perfectly indifferent."

"Will nothing induce you, Lady Clotilde, to alter your decision?" said Mr. Tresham, earnestly.

"No," she replied, with a sad, gentle smile ; "nothing, unless you can prove to me it is an unwise one, and that is, I fear, impossible. Good-by, Mr. Tresham, until we meet again."

When she had once more quitted the room Lord Dynecourt turned to his lawyer.

"Now," he said, "was there ever an unfortunate man in such a fix as this? Was there ever anything so unlucky? Where shall I hide myself? How am I to bear the sneers and contempt of the world, when it shall know my story?"

An expression of something like contempt came over the lawyer's shrewd face ; it lingered there one half-minute, then died away.

"My lord," he said, gravely, "it seems to me that you are the least to be pitied of the three so fatally brought together. Lady Clotilde has all my share of sympathy and sorrow."

"That will be the case with every one," said Lord Dynecourt. "That is what makes me so annoyed. After all—speak fairly, Tresham—what have I done worse than any young man of my age does? I have been a thousand times better than some."

"Thank goodness," said the old lawyer, "I never was a young man of the world in that sense. Of such follies I am no judge. Far better to ruin clients, as we are accused of doing, than to break hearts."

"Well, it is an awkward fix. How can I face Lady Voyse?"

She is like Lady Clotilde in her notions. I shall look like a perfect simpleton; still, a nobleman should never hesitate in facing a difficulty. I must get through it after some fashion. It will make a wretched man of me, I know that."

"I have always heard that sin brought its own punishment," said Mr. Tresham, gravely.

My lord shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know what you call sin," he said. "I suppose, after this, every simpleton who can carry a stone will feel at liberty to fling one at me. Do not be long, Tresham, before you follow us down to Lady Voyse's. I shall want some one to support me in the scenes that I shall have to go through."

"I will go down the day after you, my lord; and from the depths of my heart I wish you free from all this trouble."

Then, with a few more words on each side, they parted, Lord Dynecourt to lament his fate, the lawyer to look up the marriage settlements that had been drawn up on the so-called marriage between Lord Dynecourt and Lady Clotilde.

Lord Dynecourt was very unhappy. He had a great dread of what the world would say; he feared its sneers; he did not like the notion of its contempt; he had always been honored, courted, flattered. He could just picture to himself the leading articles that would comment on his case; the newspaper criticisms; the name of Dynecourt held up to universal execration. The reputation of being a man of gallantry is one thing; to be considered a general favorite with the fair sex is another; but to have the blight of a life like Lady Clotilde's laid at his door, was quite another thing.

"There never has been a Dynecourt yet who committed suicide," he said to himself, "or I would fain do it."

There was only one gleam of comfort for him. Supposing that the worst came—that Lady Clotilde left him—that he was

obliged to acknowledge this first marriage—there was just one comfort ; it left him a son and heir.

“ I shall disappoint the man who has spent his life in hoping to succeed me,” he thought, with a smile. And that Lord Dynecourt *could* smile was a sign that his heart was not quite broken.

That same evening Silvia received a note from Lady Clotilde ; it said simply :

“ MY DEAR SILVIA :—I am going to-morrow to my mother, Lady Voyse, at Amphill Park, where every arrangement will be made for your future ; and you may rely upon it that it will not be long before your proper position, and that of your little son, is secured to you.”

Silvia’s tears fell warm over the signature of “ Clotilde Voyse.”

“ It is so cruel to her,” she murmured, “ and yet she will have it so. I would bear it for her, but she will not let me ; she, to herself, is cruelly good. How will it end ? I see no way out of it, but death ; yet I dare not think who should die.”

Some time afterward that thought returned to her as a prophecy. Already the destroying angel had taken his aim, and the shadow of death hung over one of the three whose interests in life were so fatally interwoven.

That night Lady Clotilde stood in her room alone. She had made all arrangements for her journey on the morrow ; she had beaten back, with a strong hand and iron will, all the love and sorrow, the anguish and despair that would have surged over her soul as angry waves beat over a shore.

“ I shall have time for sorrow afterward,” she said to herself, “ when the dead, gray level of my life sets in, and I begin to realize that it must be passed without Basil.”

Her maid looked up in astonishment, when she received the orders to pack for her mistress.

“To leave London before the season was ended—what could it mean?” But from the white, calm face of Lady Clotilde she learnt nothing.

“Never mind my jewels,” she said gently. “I will select what I want to take with me.”

When the glittering, costly contents of the cases were laid before her, she took from them all the jewels that she had brought with her from home; but the magnificent heirlooms of the Dynecourts, the diamonds and rubies, richest spoils of an Eastern land, she left untouched; the costly and superb presents that Lord Dynecourt had made to her were all laid aside.

“I was *not* his wife,” she thought, with a swelling heart; “I had no right to them.”

The longing to fling herself on the ground and weep out her bitter anguish and passionate tears was fierce enough to cause her even physical pain, but she restrained it.

“There will be time enough to weep,” she thought, “when I have left him, and the wrench is made.”

The boxes were packed and arranged, were carried away, the jewel cases relocked. The maid had gone to her room, and Lady Clotilde stood more utterly alone than any words had power to tell—alone, with the wreck and ruin of her life around her.

Then the tempest of grief that she could no longer control swept over her. Did ever Heaven look down on such bitter tears? Did ever such wild, bitter anguish rend any desolate heart?

The happy days of her happy love came back to her—the happy months of her married life, before any cloud ever dimmed the glory of her sky.

It was such a fate—such a bitter, cruel, unmerited fate. Perhaps God took pity on her as she lay there, and decreed for her happiness such as this life could bring never more.

CHAPTER LXXV.

DIVORCED BY HEAVEN.

THERE was some little surprise expressed in the household at Dynewold House that my lord and my lady should go away so suddenly, leaving town when the season was most brilliant, and the engagements most numerous; but even that surprise died away when it became known that their destination was Amphyll Park. My lord was taking his valet with him, but Lady Clotilde had said distinctly she was not going to take her maid.

She had been very dearly loved, this proud, gentle, high-born lady, who never addressed an inferior save in the most courteous terms, who had taken the kindest interest in all her dependents, whose hands were ever open to relieve the distressed and succor the unfortunate. There was not a member of her household who had not some generous action, some kindly sympathy, some trait of benevolence to record of her. There was not one whom she had not assisted either in word or deed, and on this, the last time they ever saw her, they looked anxiously at her, wondering what had dimmed the brightness of her face, and why she was so calm, so cold, and so unlike herself.

The carriage was ordered for half-past eleven; the train left Euston Square at noon, and reached Amphyll about three. Lady Clotilde had quitted her room. On the night before

she had looked her last round the home where the happiest hours of her life had been spent. She had looked around with proud, calm, silent eyes, taking her quiet farewell of every room, of every place that had been endeared to her by memories of the man she loved ; and no one knew or understood the tempest of agony that shook both her heart and soul.

Not willingly would she renew that agony ; not willingly would she look round the home that was no longer hers—the home where in after years her story would be told, and her name held up to unusual pity. When her heart softened, when her eyes filled with burning tears, she said to herself :

“ Let me always remember that I never had any place here ; I have never been Lord Dynecourt’s wife,” and the reflection was sufficient ; it brought both pride and courage to her aid.

Lord Dynecourt, who was perhaps the most unhappy, not having the consolation of right-doing to sustain him, who was miserable beyond all words of mine to describe, had sent to request an interview with her, but she had declined.

“ It would be quite useless,” she wrote ; “ my resolution is unchangeable, and an interview would only pain us both. I have no reproach to make. I pray you to forbear all useless words.”

So, with a sigh of resignation, to what he evidently considered a very unkind fate, my lord forebore. And the first time he saw Lady Clotilde on the day of her departure from his house was as she stood in the hall, ready dressed for traveling. Few words passed between them ; there was just a courteous morning greeting to save appearances. No one knew the sorrow, the anguish, the despair that was rending that gentle heart. Then Lady Clotilde took her seat, and the carriage drove on ; she had left Lord Dynecourt’s house forever.

A prayer for mercy passed her lips as she looked her last on the well-loved, familiar spot ; that prayer had already been heard and granted.

Any newspaper in England can tell the rest of the story in plain and forcible language ; the great Amphill Collision, as it is called, is not yet forgotten, for a more terrible accident never occurred. All England shivered as it was read. So many killed, so many wounded, so many crippled for life, so much sorrow and desolation, all arising from the simplest cause—an overworked, underpaid servant, who mistook his signals, and allowed two express trains to meet and come into violent collision, when the one should have been detained until the other had gone past. People read and shrugged their shoulders, wondering indignantly when this state of things would cease, and people who paid for safety find it. Then, after a long, dreary inquiry which ended in nothing, compensations were paid, claims allowed, one or two officials blamed, one imprisoned, and then the great Amphill Collision became a thing of the past. It was marked in the almanacs, and quoted always when the security of railway traveling was in question.

It was a terrible accident ; and, strange to say, the first-class carriages had suffered most severely. The collision had taken place on an embankment, and three of the carriages had been driven over the brink, and had fallen into the fields below. Amongst them was one where Lord Dynecourt and Lady Clotilde had sat alone. The morning was so fair and bright that all thoughts of death or accident seemed out of place ; in fact, no such idea had entered any one's mind. The sun shone, and the beautiful country lay laughing in its light. The leaves were all green on the hedges, and wild roses mixed with honeysuckle made them one mass of fragrant bloom.

The birds were singing ; the flowers sent forth their sweet breath ; the world lay warm, bright, and fragrant under the blue sky.

Lord Dynecourt had said nothing. One look at the white face, and the anguish that lay so deep in those beautiful eyes, showed him words were all in vain. Only, as the beautiful morning, the sunny, smiling landscape, and the fragrant air touched his keen love of the pleasant and the lovely, he turned to her, saying :

“Clotilde, will you believe me that I would lay down my life to have all this misery undone ?”

The train was drawing very near to the fatal embankment then ; they had traveled far in unbroken silence.

A tender gleam of light broke up the white, cold expression of her face.

“I believe it, Basil,” she replied ; and those were nearly the last words Lady Clotilde ever spoke.

Then came a sudden shock—a violent motion that seemed to run through the train. He looked at her with a pale, scared face.

“There is an accident, I am afraid,” he said, and rising instinctively as though to shield her.

While he lived he liked to remember that she did not shrink from him, but looked up into his face with a faint smile. As the horror deepened, and the terrified cry of many voices was heard, she whispered :

“Is it death, Basil ?”

“I am afraid,” he replied, with a quivering in his voice.

“Thank Heaven ! then you may be spared !”

He liked to remember how her eyes sought his, and she half-raised her face to him. Even then, in that supreme moment, he noticed how radiant was the light on her brow ; the

next, thick darkness and horror had overwhelmed him ; he lay, with her in his arms, under the broken wreck of the carriage, which had rattled down the embankment. .

He was powerless to move or stir ; the keen agony that had at first run with a burning shudder through his limbs, gave place to a still more dreadful numbness ; he could hardly think ; the faculty of thought seemed all gone from him.

The first prayer that he had said for years trembled on his lips, and then all was oblivion. Hours afterward, when Lord Dynecourt opened his eyes, he was lying in the principal room of the hotel at Amphill, and the first news he received was that Lady Clotilde had been taken from his arms dead.

Was it best so ? Heaven only knows ! She had thought so, for her last words were that he would be spared ; and spared he was, so far as the scorn and contempt of the world went. He escaped that, and in its stead found warmest sympathy and pity. All that was known was that he was traveling with Lady Clotilde to Amphill, and that while she was killed, he escaped with his life, only to be a helpless cripple while that life lasted. It was long before any one knew more ; and when it was found necessary to extend that knowledge, it was only to two or three people.

Was it best for her ? Little need to ask ! One look at the beautiful face, with peace ineffable on the lips and brow, the question was answered. She had chosen the higher, nobler, better part ; she had laid her heart and her life on the altar of duty ; but what that sacrifice had cost her, and what she had suffered in making it, no one knew but herself.

Heaven had been merciful to her ; her fair name, the sanctity of the life she had believed to be her married life, her sensitive pride, her keen sense of honor, had escaped all outrage ; her name was not to be the butt of newspapers and the

text for leading articles ; her story was not to be conned over by lovers of a new sensation ; her broken heart was not to be discussed by idlers of the clubs and the *élégantes* of the drawing-room.

The price she paid for her freedom was only her life, and women of highest honor oftentimes value that least.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

TARDY JUSTICE.

FOR once the world was unfeignedly sorry. Lady Clotilde had not only been loved but highly esteemed. No one had any fault to find with her, and her early death was most sincerely lamented.

They did not know—they who mourned so sincerely for her—that life had become a trouble and a burden greater than she could bear ; they did not know that the swift, sudden, terrible death was to her a blessing in disguise. There was no one to remonstrate, when on the white marble monument her name was engraved—

“LADY CLOTILDE DYNECOURT.”

There were only three persons living who knew the name had never been hers—Lord Dynecourt, who lay between life and death ; Mr. Tresham, who would not betray his knowledge ; Silvia, who would freely have given her life for that one that had been taken.

So Lady Dynecourt was laid to rest, and the world never knew her story.

Lord Dynecourt was dangerously ill for a long time. It was often thought that recovery for him was impossible, and it was almost to be feared that he did not care for his life at

the price. He was to be crippled, he was to be unable to walk, to move freely, with the use of one arm gone ; and for a gay, handsome, accomplished man of the world such a fate was worse than death.

He had leisure, as he lay there, to repent of his sins, to form better resolutions for the future, to bewail his folly, and to learn the lesson so many learn too late—that honesty and straightforward dealing, high principle and honor, are safer guides for a man than the indulgence in pleasure, and the gratification of every idle whim.

He learned that lesson. He became a wiser, better man ; but the price that he paid for that learning was a terrible one.

When he recovered himself, and was able to understand something of what was going on, they told him of Lady Clotilde's funeral, and of the superb monument erected to her. No one understood the intense anxiety with which he asked what had been put on it ; no one knew why his dim eyes filled with tears, and his lips quivered, as he heard the name—“ Lady Clotilde Dynecourt.”

It does not come within the province of these pages to tell how deeply Lady Voyse felt her daughter's death ; she never quite recovered it, or was the same afterward.

Two months passed before Lord Dynecourt was able to take any part in even the least affairs of life, and then his first action was to send for Silvia. He was still remaining at the hotel at Amphyll, for it had been considered dangerous to remove him. No wonder or curiosity was excited by the arrival of the beautiful lady, whose sweet face was so sad, and who was mourning so deeply.

When she saw how ill, how haggard and changed he looked, she had no words for him but those of kindness. He held out one hand imploringly to her.

“My wife,” he said ; “my true wife. Silvia, can you ever forgive me ?”

And in those few words she read a full acknowledgment of his guilt.

“Silvia,” he said, when all the vehemence of her first emotion had passed, “will you forget this miserable past, and take your place as my wife. It is a late atonement that I offer you.”

She shrank with trembling hands.

“I am unworthy,” she said, “to take *her* place. She was the noblest of women ; I was but a poor, obscure girl.”

He smiled faintly, with something of bitterness in his smile.

“Ah, Silvia ! it is no enviable position that I can offer you. I am but the wreck of a man ; my strength has failed me ; my health has left me. The days in which we wandered side by side over the heather and the purple moors are passed ; the world is almost over for me. It is almost cruel to ask you to give your sweet life to me ! you are young and beautiful still. My life—while I——”

And the once proud man buried his face in his hands as he wept aloud. He could not have made any appeal to her feelings which would have touched her more deeply. She knelt down by his side, and kissed the poor, nerveless hands.

“Do not weep, my love,” she said ; “you had my youth and my love ; you shall have all the rest of my life. But we must never forget her—never.”

He shrank as though she had touched an aching nerve.

“When I do forget her,” he said, “I shall forget the very angels in Heaven, and even Heaven itself.”

Then, after some minutes, he bent down and whispered :

“Silvia, I should so much like to see my son.”

Her face flushed hotly. The little babe, who had been deserted, who had been neglected, whose little life had been

considered a burden, was now of so much consequence. He would, some day or other, be the great and mighty Lord Dynecourt; that little, half-forgotten Cyril, who had never been loved or cherished by any one save herself.

“Will you bring him to me? My only gleam of comfort in all this trouble is that I shall have a son to be, I hope, a comfort and a blessing to me.”

“I will bring him,” said Silvia, and she kept her word.

In a few days she returned, taking with her the beautiful, blooming boy, who bore so great a resemblance to Lord Dynecourt. *He* had never been so touched in all his life as when he saw Cyril. Tears rose to his eyes, warm, blinding tears.

“And this is my boy,” he said, in a broken voice.

Silvia was too generous to reproach him. She did not say, “Yes; the boy you left to the mercy of the world.” But Cyril raised his beautiful, fearless eyes to his father’s face.

“Are you my papa?” he asked. “I did not know that I had one. I thought he was dead.”

“Will you try to love me, Cyril?” he asked, after a short pause.

“Yes; but I never can love you one half so much as my dear mamma; you will not expect that.”

When Lord Dynecourt was able to be removed he asked to be taken abroad. But before leaving England he sent for Lady Voyse, and made her a full confession of all that had happened. She did not add to his misery by any reproaches; she saw that he felt keenly enough all that had happened, and she forebore.

He also felt for the gentleman who had believed himself to be “Lord Dynecourt’s heir;” every needful proof of Cyril’s legitimacy was laid before him, and, greatly disappointed though he was, he was obliged to own that Silvia’s son must

succeed his father. Then Lord Dynecourt sent for his lawyers, and made every arrangement for the future.

After that he went to Italy for a time, and there Silvia joined him ; and all that people knew was that Lord Dynecourt had married again, and that his second wife was, if possible, more beautiful and more gentle than his first. It was not for long years afterward, when it was known that Cyril was to succeed him, that an inkling of the true state of the case was made known ; then Lord Dynecourt was dead, and of his widow no questions were asked.

One thing that Lord Dynecourt did made Silvia very happy. He made her tell him all that had passed when she received his letter ; he learned then how dearly she had loved him, when the loss of him had driven her almost to death.

“I must go and see that Mr. Douglas,” he said, “he deserves my thanks, and he shall have them. He saved for me my wife and son.”

He went, and was so profuse in his gratitude, so munificent in his presents, that the good minister never knew want again while he lived. Lord Dynecourt forgot no one who had ever been kind to his wife—they were all rewarded.

Was Silvia, Lady Dynecourt, happy ? No one ever knew. She devoted her whole time and thoughts to her invalid husband ; but to those who knew and loved her best, there was something of sadness in the fair face, a shadow in the sweet eyes, that did not tell of unalloyed content. It was not a gay life, there was not even much amusement in it, but it was filled with active duties, and to some that is the happiest life of all.

Mrs. Greville did not marry again ; and when Silvia returned, to take her place in the great world as Lady Dynecourt, they became greater friends than ever.

Her elevation gave pleasure to every one, for she had made many friends and no enemies. Lord Dynecourt was considered a very fortunate man by all who knew him.

He lived ten years after his marriage, and died leaving his wife one of the most beautiful and wealthy women in England.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS.

OPEN the papers and read whose name comes almost first in all the lists of charities ; see who is patroness of every institution that has benevolence for its object ; see who has founded those magnificent homes for the young and the friendless : she who espouses so warmly the cause of the lonely and sorrowful ; she whose vast fortune is more than half spent on others, and those others the poor and needy—Lady Silvia Dynecourt's.

During her husband's lifetime she concentrated her thoughts and attention on him. She studied the duties of her high position, and filled them so as to excite the esteem and admiration of all who knew her. She was one of the queens of society ; yet no home duty was ever neglected. She held one of the most brilliant positions in England, yet the simplicity, the purity, the modest grace that had always distinguished her, clung to her still, and won for her the most admiring and affectionate love.

That noble and exalted lady, whose life the poet tells us is all pure and serene, had the highest opinion of Lady Silvia Dynecourt ; no one was more frequently invited to Court, or more highly welcomed there.

The time came for her, as it comes for all others, when the

sorrows of her life became to her more a sad memory than a bitter reality ; when they faded before the active duties that left her no time for regret.

One of Lady Silvia's favorite haunts was the picture gallery at Dynewold House. She never entered without thinking of Lady Clotilde's prophecy, and wondering if the gray shade really hovered there. It was by her special wish that the magnificent portrait of Lady Clotilde was placed there by Lord Dynecourt's side.

Those who have once seen that picture never forget it. It is of Lady Clotilde, in all the pride of her calm, patrician beauty : but there is something about it that rivets one's attention as no other picture ever does. There is a light on the brow—in the twilight it looks almost like a halo—a light such as one sees in the faces of martyrs, a something of heroism in the clear eyes. One feels instinctively that it is a picture of a truly noble woman, a woman with a grand soul, one capable of highest heroism and greatest deeds.

It was no rare thing for Lady Silvia, when she went there in the gloaming, to find her husband there ; to see him standing looking at the picture, with gaze intent.

She never spoke to him on those occasions, but would go up to him and place one arm round his neck ; together they would look upon that noble face, and then turn in silence away.

They never forgot her ; her memory seemed almost like a living presence among them. Every day brought some fresh mention of her. It was rather as though she lived again in Lady Silvia than had died from earth.

During those ten years that Lord Dynecourt lived with his beautiful and devoted wife by his side, he in some measure redeemed the faults of his youth. Disabled and crippled, he could not take any very active part in life ; but under

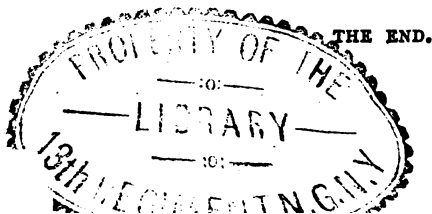
the guidance of Lady Silvia, he did what he could. He became famous for his charities, for his support of all liberal and generous measures. He found in the son he had once abandoned the greatest comfort and consolation. Cyril grew up, beautiful alike in person, mind, and soul. The honors of the Dynecourts could not have fallen into more noble hands.

Then, when Basil Lord Dynecourt died, Cyril succeeded him, and he bids fair to become, in a few years, one of the leading men in England. For long he refused to marry; his love for his beautiful mother was something wonderful to see. He declared that until he could find some one like her he would never marry. This season there is a rumor that the Duke of Hartleigh's youngest daughter, the lovely, gentle Lady Blanche, will soon be Lady Dynecourt.

Lady Silvia lives at Dynewold House—it is seldom that she goes into the country; she is busily engaged now in founding homes for the homeless young girls who are thrown on the world; she spares no expense, no trouble, no labor, and she has by her charities saved more young girls from destruction than could be counted.

If there be one class to whom she is more merciful, more considerate, more gentle than another, it is to those who have been duped and deceived by the selfishness of men.

Beautiful, honored, and beloved, we leave her. Her story might have been different, but Heaven was good to her; and through many perils and tribulations she was led into the more pleasant paths of life—paths where no one fulfills duties more nobly, more patiently than she who was "THROWN ON THE WORLD."



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